From the author of The Sharp End

GABRIELLE LORD

feeding the demons

'Lord is an excellent crime writer' THE SUNDAY TIMES

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Praise for *The Sharp End*

'Lord is an excellent Australian crime writer'
The Sunday Times

'The technical and forensic detail and the criminological and psychological depth of this novel give it substance. Lord has established an intricate web of character relationships, and her characters, interesting in themselves, make an indirect statement about modern women's lives. However, the primary quality of this book is its fast pace. Totally absorbing, this is the perfect thriller to curl up with'
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Susanna Yager, *Sunday Telegraph*

WITHDRAWN

Also by Gabrielle Lord

The Sharp End

Gabrielle Lord's jobs have included teaching, brick-cleaning and peach-picking among others. She read English at university and also gained a degree in Screenwriting. She lives in Sydney with her partner, who is a policeman.

Feeding the Demons

Gabrielle Lord

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For Sabina.

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1995

'Mum? It's me.'

Kit felt her heart contract, melt then shrink. 'What is it, Will?' she asked, her voice sharper than she'd intended. She leaned against the counter for support, feeling the clench in her guts, her neck.

'I've got to have money. You've *got* to give it to me. *Please.*'

Kit practised several deep breaths. She could see Gerald standing near the kitchen doorway frozen into attention, staring at her, knowing it was their son on the phone, his thick eyebrows contracted.

'We've discussed this, Will,' she said, keeping her voice as neutral as she could. 'You know that I can't do that. I can't give you any more money. You are a heroin addict' – she said the words as purposefully and as far as possible without anger – 'and you need to seek treatment.'

'*Fuck that!*' His voice was a scream. 'I'm not one of your fucking clients. I need money and you won't give it to me. A measly hundred bucks is all I'm asking. You want to see me sell myself? Is that what you want? *Is it?*' Kit imagined her son's once handsome, open face now contorted with the pain of thwarted need.

'Will,' she said, her voice trembling. 'You know I don't

want that. But people who choose to continue to use heroin end up having to do things like that.'

'You don't care. You never cared about me.' He was almost in tears now, raw and strung out.

'Will,' she said as the tears overflowed her own eyes and ran down her face, 'I'm your mother and I love you. You must take responsibility for your own life. No one else in the world can do that. I can no longer support your addiction. I'm going to hang up this phone now. There is no point to this conversation.' And she did, cutting off his wailing abuse.

She was shaking and as she turned to her husband, the phone started ringing again. 'Don't pick it up,' said Gerald, leaving the room, shoulders hunched, head down, leaving her to face everything alone as he always did when the going got tough.

Kit hesitated. It might be one of her clients. She didn't pick up the receiver, letting the answering machine click in, listening to herself saying: 'Hullo, you've rung Kit Westlake. Please leave a message and I'll get back to you as soon as I can.' Will's voice sobbed over the recorded words. 'Talk to me! Pick up the damn phone. I know you're there, Mum. Mum, *please*.'

Kit snatched up the phone. 'Will, I'll talk to you when you start going to NA and get serious about recovering from your addiction to heroin. Otherwise, I can't have any contact with you.' Then she hung up and snatched the phone off the hook with hands that were shaking so much that she nearly sent the whole thing flying. She stood at the sink, staring sightlessly out the window, bringing her breathing slowly under control, pushing tears away with her fingers.

Will's phone campaign had started some days before, when she'd told him she would no longer supply him with money or a place to live. Intellectually, she knew that what she was doing gave him the best chance of recovery, and

that the other way would do nothing but hasten his death. But her mother's heart broke every time she thought about him and the filthy squat he was living in, the anguish he was experiencing right now, in withdrawal, with its accompanying nausea, pain in head and joints, despair and sickness. She couldn't help remembering the small, brave boy who had sung his special elephant song for her to cheer her up when she'd been so sad in those days of Gerald's first deep depression when he couldn't teach, only sit around or sleep. She understood too well some of the bitter foundations of her son's later addiction, set up in part by the very nature of that early relationship with her and her depressed husband, where the child had assumed responsibility for the comforting of both parents. Knowing these things too late was very hard for her to bear. But you can't know what you don't know, as her therapist Alexander used to say to her in those days, you simply did the only thing you could. No blame, no shame. That's how it was.

Kit drank a glass of water and walked down to the front of the house, past Gerald's closed bedroom, and outside. On the right was the therapy room, with its separate entrance.

Kit glanced at the clock. Her usually punctual two pm client had not arrived yet and she was grateful for this extra time. I'll have to put the phone back on, Kit thought, going back to the kitchen where Gerald now stood with a brandy. She saw he'd already replaced the handset.

'I'm going to change the phone number,' he said, 'to a silent unlisted. I've had enough of this.'

'But, Gerald, that wouldn't work for me, for my practice. My clients must be able to ring me.'

'I don't care. I can't stand this.'

'We have to stand it. It's our son.'

The phone suddenly rang, causing Kit to jump. 'Don't answer that!' Gerald said.

'I must,' she said. 'Merrina might be trying to ring me. She's late.'

'Kit, don't. Let it ring. He'll keep tormenting you if you keep picking up.'

But she'd already picked it up, bracing herself.

'Kit. It's Angie McDonald. Remember me? Gemma's friend?'

It took Kit a second or two to remember this policewoman, a friend of her sister's. 'We've got a nasty situation involving one of your clients,' Angie hurried on to say. 'That's why I'm ringing you.'

'What? Who?'

'Adrian Adams.'

'He's no longer a client. I had to refer him on.'

'He's *insisting* that you come. It's very tense. He's locked himself in a bathroom with his girlfriend's eighteen-month-old son. He says if you don't come he's going to kill himself and the kid. He refuses to speak to anyone else. I'm sending someone around to pick you up.'

Kit felt agitated so she took a deep breath. 'Angie, I didn't have the skill or the experience to deal with him. That's why I had to refer him on. My presence could make the whole thing worse.'

'You've got to come. You're the only person in the world he says he'll talk to. Just come and talk, for Chrissake.'

Kit was aware of someone banging on the door. 'There's someone at the door,' she said.

'That'll be Brian Hepplethwaite,' said Angie. 'I sent him to collect you. Hurry up.'

It was, and as they sped in a white Commodore along Parramatta Road to the house at Ashfield, Detective Sergeant

Brian Hepplethwaite filled her in. 'The girlfriend rang us earlier,' he told Kit, occasionally turning his worried face towards her. 'There'd been a terrible blue last night when she'd tried to break it off with him. Asked him to move out. Now he's grabbed the little fellow and they're both in the bathroom. In the bath. Bloody lunatic.'

'Why don't you just break the door down,' Kit asked, 'and grab him?'

He braked suddenly as someone cut in too close ahead. 'Stupid prick, sorry ma'am,' he said in one rush. 'We can't. He's got a bloody radiator in there, perched right on the edge of the bath. Says he'll drop it in the water if anyone does anything. Said you're the only person he trusts.'

Kit recalled Adrian Adams, withdrawn, inarticulate and boiling with rage, the thin young man who had asked for her help over his inability to get along with workmates or maintain relationships with women.

'What about the little boy? Is he all right?'

'So far. He's splashing away. But sooner or later he's going to want to get out.'

'And then he'll start crying,' said Kit. 'Why can't you just cut the power to the house?'

The Commodore sped along Parramatta Road, with every set of lights favouring it as if providence was on their side. 'The Council's stuffing around trying to find someone who knows the street,' said Brian. 'The usual electrician is on leave. It's an old house that's been made over into flatettes. The downstairs bathroom is a closed-in verandah. The bloody powerboard is in there, would you believe, on the wall opposite the bath. We've got an electrician tracing the wiring plan but the electricals have been done illegally and it's old and dangerous as hell.'

The car was slowing in front of an old house that would

have been a gentleman's residence at the turn of the century, a formerly fine old Victorian with bay windows and balconies, now stripped of its wrought iron, with enclosed verandahs and the once graceful triple windows at the front of the house punched out and squared to allow aluminium sliding frames.

As they pulled up, Kit saw the unmarked police cars and a huddle of men and women, both in and out of uniform, who stood well back outside the line of vision of anyone in the house.

Brian parked the vehicle and Angie, easily identifiable by her gleaming red hair, detatched herself from a conversation and hurried over to join them. She put her hand through the window.

'Kit, thanks for coming. He's in there. Down the side and round the back. Come and I'll take you.' Kit got out of the car and followed Angie across the footpath into the front yard of the old house. Angie turned to her without stopping. 'Tell me about Adrian Adams,' she said.

Kit followed her around the house, past some police personnel and down an overgrown side path. A long enclosure, fibro and glass and badly in need of painting, ran half the length of the verandah. Two officers from the State Protection Group in blue fatigues and GP boots stood half-hidden in oleander and newly sprouting hydrangea bushes near the fence to the next-door property.

'He's intelligent, but that's not obvious because almost all his energy goes into rage control,' Kit finally said. 'He's capable of great violence.'

'Tell me something I don't know,' hissed Angie as they came closer to the back of the building.

'He's the son of professional people and was completely brutalised as a child. By both parents, but especially the father. I worked with him for a few months a couple of

years ago, but I wasn't sure that I had the experience to handle his level of damage and I told him this. He didn't like it. He'd learned no containment. He was a powder keg – a walking rage bomb. But the good thing was that he knew it and this was the place we started with the work. After a few months, though, I felt he needed a bigger therapist and I mean that in a lot of different ways. So I referred him on to someone much more experienced. Later I heard he didn't go on with the therapy.'

Ahead of them was the back door to the house, while on the left was the door to the enclosed bathroom where the man and the child were. The two women stepped quietly up onto the back steps. Kit could hear a man singing and the chattering sounds of a very young child. Angie went to the door and knocked.

'Adrian? It's me, Angie McDonald. I've done what you wanted. I've brought Mrs Westlake with me. We want to do everything your way, Adrian, so that no one gets hurt.'

'Are you really there, Kit? Is she telling the truth?' His voice was strained, strangled by the tension in his throat.

'I'm really here, Adrian,' Kit called back, repeating his words. 'She's telling the truth. What do you want me to do for you?' She tried to keep her voice level and ordinary. 'Is the little boy all right? And are you all right?'

'We're both fine,' he said. 'At the moment.' Kit shivered at the warning. 'Tell those fucking police to go away. I want to talk privately with you.'

'I will, Adrian, but they may not take any notice of me.'

'They'd better,' he said. 'This radiator is getting pretty hot.'

Kit turned to Angie, eyebrows raised in question.

'We can't go away,' Angie whispered. 'That's not negotiable. We can't leave that little kid with him.'

'Could you drive the vehicles away?' Kit said. 'He'd hear the sounds of cars leaving at least. It might take some of the pressure off him.' Angie nodded and ran down the steps. Kit turned her attention back to the locked door.

'Could you unlock the door?' she asked. 'I could come in and talk with you in private.'

'I don't think so,' he said. 'If I get out of the bath, Jed might knock the radiator in. It's too dangerous.'

'Could you turn the radiator off, Adrian? It's hard for me to talk with you, knowing that you're both in danger like this.'

There was a silence. 'Now that,' he said finally, 'is something that I cannot do, not even for you.'

Kit's mind was working furiously. She was trying to find a way to defuse this, take the pressure down a few notches. She pressed up against the frosted glass louvres on the left-hand side of the locked door, feeling hopeless. From the front of the house came the sounds of vehicles starting up.

'Can you hear that, Adrian? The police cars are leaving from the front of the house. They're moving away. I know you're doing this for a reason. Just tell me what it is. Let's work out a way that gets you what you want without all this muddle.'

Kit was aware of Angie tiptoeing back up the steps and remaining silent and close behind her. Kit had found a tiny peephole, a space between the housing for the old louvres and the ancient timber of the window frames. She squinted to see, then motioned Angie to come up and take a look. Angie looked through a moment, then withdrew, scribbling something on her notebook. Kit automatically read it upside down: 'Powerboard on wall on left', she read, 'between side and back louvres at about one and a half metres'. Angie ripped the page out and passed it to one of the SPG officers.

Through the tiny gap, Kit could see the bath set into a long bench that ran the length of the right-hand wall. Behind the man's head, bottles of shampoo and cleaning fluids had been knocked aside to make room for the old-fashioned one-bar radiator that glowed red. Adrian Adams was sitting up in the bath, rocking back and forth, and in front of him, with his back to Kit, was the small boy. Kit drew back, alerted by a sudden stealthy movement from the two State Protection officers near the bottom of the steps.

They were speaking with a third who was indicating something inside the bathroom, probably the position of the powerboard, thought Kit, and pointing to the external wall.

'Let's make a contract, Adrian,' Kit said. 'Let's find a way together to make this situation turn out well. You tell me why you're doing this – what you want – and we'll sort it out.' Adrian had stopped rocking while she spoke, and was staring straight at her without seeing her, his eyes black with demons.

'I want to come and live with you,' he said. He started rocking again. 'I want to be with you. I want to move in with you so that you can help me. You're the only one who really listened to me. If I lived with you, I'd be able to make things work.'

Kit took a deep breath. It was a common enough fantasy among some clients.

'Adrian, we can talk about how to make things work if you come out of there,' said Kit. 'But we can't do it here, with you under all this pressure and me stuck out here. And it puts me under pressure, too.'

He stopped rocking and reached a hand behind him to the heater's reflective shield so that steam hissed. 'How do I know,' said Adrian, 'that you're not just saying these things,

and then the minute I come out the pigs'll jump me and beat me to a pulp?'

Kit felt a jab in her back. She turned to find Angie shoving her notebook at her. Kit grabbed it and read 'Promise him anything'. 'Anything' had been underlined three times.

'I'll come in, if you'll let me,' said Kit, 'and we'll go out together. I'll go with you while we sort this out.'

'That bitch will tell the cops I tried to kill her.' The baby seemed to understand the reference to his mother and started wailing; Kit could see the red flush moving round his narrow neck and upper shoulders. The yelling grew louder.

'Adrian, you'll have to trust me,' said Kit, already feeling like Judas. But the child's growing level of distress and Adrian's resumed rocking created its own compulsion. 'Please,' she said. 'We can work something out, even with the baby's mother. We can get a counsellor. Lawyers. You don't have to be alone in this.' The little boy's wailing reached a sobbing crescendo.

'Make this kid shut up!' Adrian yelled. 'It's driving me crazy!'

Behind her, the two SPG officers had mounted the stairs. 'Adrian,' Kit said, 'put the radiator down off that surface. I can sense that you're feeling a lot of pressure. I am, too. We can fix this muddle, you know we can.'

Adrian rocked faster and faster, hands over his ears. The child was becoming hysterical, coughing and choking on his own distress, jerking tiny fists about in anguish. Adrian had started screaming, too. 'Shutup, shutup, *shutup!*' and his violent yelling terrified the little child even more. Please, Kit prayed. Give me the wisdom to know what to do.

'Let me in and I can stop the baby's crying,' she yelled over the noise. 'Turn the radiator off and let me in. I can help you, Adrian.'

What happened next was like a weird, slow-motion series of violent actions in which her role seemed dreamlike and disembodied. She'd remembered Alexander's counsel and had been automatically watching Adrian's hands, so she saw the very beginning of the movement, heard herself hiss to Angie, '*He's going for the radiator!*' Almost while she was saying the words, she heard Angie yell something behind her, felt herself knocked to the ground. The door suddenly crashed inwards onto the bathroom floor and GP boots raced past bare inches from her nose. Shots rang out, louvres shattered, the baby's crying changed to a shriek, Adrian's voice pierced the air with obscenities, she saw Angie dive past her and into the bathroom, while Kit herself rolled to one side instinctively as the powerboard, ripped from the inside wall, smashed outside through the louvres.

'*Jesus you fucking bitch! You conned me! You bitch!*' Adrian Adams' crazed face screamed down at her as she huddled on the floor. He was rushed bodily past her, naked and dripping, his one arm twisted cruelly up behind his neck, the other in a wrist lock. 'I'll kill you for this,' his voice continued from around the side. '*You'll die!*' She heard the sickening sound of a heavy punch on a wet body and the curdled scream of her erstwhile client. Angie ran out holding the shrieking little boy wrapped in a towel.

From nowhere came his mother, now permitted on the scene, a thin young girl who broke away from the police-woman attending her. 'Give me my baby!' she sobbed, pushing Angie out of the way, grabbing the terrified child. 'That bastard! I'll kill him for this!' she screamed.

Kit covered her face with her hands. She felt Angie's hand on her shoulder and slowly started to get up. But her legs were like jelly and she suddenly sat down again. 'Thank God,' was all she could say. 'Thank God.'

* * *

Later, Angie drove her to Gemma's place at Tamarama and came inside with her. 'You'll need to make a statement,' Angie said. 'But not now. Let your sister look after you a bit. I've got to get straight back.'

'It was awful, Gems,' she told her sister as they sat on the deck, having a stiff Scotch. 'I just didn't know what to do. I've reached that place in the therapy room quite often with a client and that's usually a good place to reach, but this was different. That little baby in the bath – poor crazed Adrian – the radiator. There was no room for a mistake. And yet there was no way to make it all right, either. I had to betray him.'

Gerald drove over and picked her up. When they got home, Kit had to ring and explain what had happened to a furious client who'd waited in vain for an hour. For the moment, the anguish over Will was pushed to one side.

Gerald cooked dinner for her, a touching gesture, Kit knew, even though the fish was overcooked into tasteless rubber and the events of the day had deprived her of appetite anyway. While she was spreading her fish fillet with tartare sauce, the phone rang. She and Gerald looked at each other, both remained sitting, waiting for the answering machine.

'Hullo, Kit. It's Angie McDonald.' Kit picked up the phone. 'Are you okay?' Angie wanted to know.

'I'm still rattled,' said Kit. 'But I'm eating something.'

Angie paused as if not quite sure how to manage the next stage of the conversation.

'I take it this is not only a social call,' said Kit, her intuition on overdrive.

'You're dead right,' said the other woman. 'I want you to come and see something. But I want you to bring Gemma with you when you do.'

'What is it?' Kit asked, alarmed.

'Adrian Adams' flat,' she said. 'You feature rather largely in it.'

Kit recalled what the disturbed young man had said earlier in the day. 'I want to come and live with you,' he'd said. 'I want to be with you.'

'What do you mean?'

'I'll pick you up in the morning,' said Angie. 'All will be revealed.'

The three women stepped into the flat, opened by Angie. The first thing Kit saw was a huge photograph of herself in rubber gloves, washing up, taken from somewhere outside her kitchen window, which faced the garden and the smaller of the streets flanking their corner block. The photo had a grainy quality to it, like a still from a European black and white movie. She frowned. 'But I've never had that picture taken,' she said stupidly. Then she looked around. Pictures of her covered the walls. She was depicted in almost every conceivable human activity: crossing roads with shopping bags, getting into or out of her car, hanging out her washing, gardening, walking in the street, eating at a restaurant with Gerald, talking to clients. There was even a misty long shot of herself in her underwear, in the bedroom, with the outline of Gerald behind her. Kit felt horrified, violated, frightened and bewildered.

From somewhere, she heard her sister say, 'Oh shit! What an arsehole. What a loony.'

'Adrian Adams is a photographer,' said Angie, 'among other things. And you seem to be his favourite subject.'

'But I had no idea,' said Kit, looking around at the images of herself, most in black and white, some in colour. By some filmic contrivance, he'd conjured a picture of the two of them,

hand in hand, with Kit seemingly looking lovingly up into Adrian's gaunt face.

'He's used long-range cameras, Kit.' Gemma studied them, moving from one to another. 'He must have followed you all the time, watched you.'

'But I had no idea,' Kit repeated.

Worse was to come in the bedroom. On the wall opposite the unmade bed was a huge pornographic image with Kit's smiling face superimposed on another woman's body, spreading legs and pubic folds, posed for Adrian Adams' gaze. Angie opened and closed drawers, pulled clothes out of cupboards, finding more boxes and more images of Kit.

'God,' said Kit sitting down. 'He asked me for a photo of myself and I declined. Ours was not a social relationship, I told him. I thought he understood.' On the bedside table she noticed a small gold bangle, hers, that had inexplicably disappeared as things invariably do when people are living with an addict.

'There's my gold bangle,' she said. 'It wasn't Will after all.' She picked it up and slipped it back over her wrist.

'What a sick rabbit,' said Gemma, ripping the huge poster from the wall. 'How dare he do this to you.' She tore the picture into strips and bits of breasts and genitals, twice the size of life, littered the floral carpet. 'In spite of all this,' she said, pointing at all the images of her sister, 'there's no feeling of this place being lived in. It's like a gallery.'

In the living room cupboards they found more boxes containing photos of Kit, some of them duplicates, printed in different tones of contrast. Kit seized up one of the photos and stared at it. 'That's weird,' she said.

'What is?' asked Angie.

'That jacket I'm wearing,' she said. 'It's one of Will's.'

'So?' asked Gemma.

'He was wearing it the day he left home. I will never forget that day.' She paused a moment to let the painful memory subside. 'Adrian Adams started seeing me *after* Will left.'

The three women looked at each other as the implication sank in. 'I would never have taken him on if I'd known about this,' said Kit. 'This really is most disquieting.'

Gemma laughed, despite the situation. 'Caboodle,' she said, the rarely used childhood nickname taking Kit by surprise, 'sometimes you sound like such a *therapist*. "Disquieting." I've never heard a human say that word in my life, only read it in books.'

In one of the boxes, they found the original pornographic nude study that had been the basis for the huge image of Kit in Adrian Adams' bedroom, and many smaller prints of it. Kit grabbed as many of them as she could find and tore them up, then she flushed them down the toilet.

'He seemed gay to me,' said Angie eventually.

'He wasn't sure,' said Kit. 'About a lot of things. We were just starting to look at the invasiveness of his mother.'

'Sure of one thing, though,' said Gemma. 'His bloody obsession with you.' The three of them stood in silence surrounded by grotesque images of Kit.

'I want to get out of here,' Kit said, hurrying back to the door. Gemma and Angie followed her out, Angie locking the door behind them and following as they went down the staircase to the ground floor.

'What will happen with all that?' Kit indicated the flat behind them as they walked through the ground floor foyer.

'It's his property,' said Angie. 'I guess his relatives will clean out the place. He's not going to be living here for a while.' After the claustrophobic black and white images upstairs, it was a relief to walk outside into the clean

sunshine and coloured brightness of the blowy October day.

'I showed you this,' said Angie, 'so's you'd know. It didn't seem right somehow that you didn't know about it.'

On the way home, Kit wished she didn't know.

ONE

1998

Gemma woke, bewildered, because the grey dawn light was coming from the wrong side. Then she remembered she wasn't at home. She lay there for a moment listening to the early morning sounds; the lifts clunking, the hotel's plumbing, the hum of the air-conditioner.

The digital clock showed 5.12 am, and above it on the veneer and particle board console stood the empty champagne bottle and the two glasses. He'd gone very early as he said he would and she was hung-over and feeling guilty about Steve. He was the reason she never used her place when she picked someone up. Even though Steve was away on a job and didn't live with her anyway, she didn't want a stranger at her place, another man in the bed she shared with Steve.

She was wide awake now and swung out to have a bath. Through the door to the lounge room of the suite, she caught a glimpse of her clothes lying on the floor where she'd undressed last night, oddly neat considering how fast they'd come off. She was about to take a closer look when she caught sight of herself in the bedroom mirror and stopped, frowning. Too much tummy, she thought. Too much champagne and not enough exercise these days. Too much sitting in nondescript vehicles with tinted windows and the laptop on her knees. The rest of her body was

okay, she thought, posing in front of the mirror, pursing her face in the silly look that she and Kit used to assume centuries ago when they were kids playing dress-ups.

While the bath was running, she sat naked on the bed and looked through her diary. An appointment with Mrs Rose Georgiou at nine, then a few calls to make to the insurance companies who comprised the bulk of her work. She'd been working to build up 'Mandate', the latest addition to her operation. For a fee, Gemma could offer suspicious women certain information about any man they might be interested in, particularly if all they'd been given was his mobile telephone number. It cost the woman less than a hundred dollars, and for that, Gemma could establish that the man in question actually *was* who he said he was, that he lived and worked where he said he did, whether or not he owned property in common with a woman who shared the same surname, and whether he had a major criminal record. These searches could be done by anyone, but Gemma could complete them in twenty-four hours instead of the days it might take an unpractised person. And all client contact could be done over the phone by credit card, if the woman so chose. No need for any embarrassment. If they wanted to discover more about the man in their sights, surveillance was the next step; this didn't come cheap. Cheating spouses created income for her business as well.

It was a tiny white bathroom without a fan, and she left the door ajar to let steam out, lowering herself into the dinky little bath. She lathered up between her legs, using her pubic mound as a soaping pad, washing away last night's man.

Every now and then, she had to do it; an agitating restlessness drove her to go to some den of iniquity as Kit called the clubs she infrequently attended, get off her face on alcohol and speed, dance like crazy for a few hours and

take some nameless man home with her to fuck till morning. In the morning, she'd wonder why she'd done it. She had much better sex with Stevie, who knew what he was doing, cared about her and knew what she liked. She knew well enough that going to bed drunk late at night, with a man who was also drunk, was not a sure-fire way to good sex. It's just my feral streak, she'd say to her sister. It's just for fun. But Kit would simply give her that steady look, sometimes shake her head. No, darling, she'd say. It's not for fun. Not at all. Think about it.

As she rubbed the washer over her face and ears, the huge secret she was keeping from her sister loomed in her mind, refusing to be banished. She faced it fair and square. It was the biggest issue of her life, she felt. It dominated everything; it was like the sky she lived under. And she was keeping it from Kit, the first secret in nearly thirty-five years. Next week would be her thirty-fifth birthday, bringing the terrible anniversary with it; the death, the hopeless struggle of a slight woman against a big man armed with a hammer. Gemma refused to think about the thirty-year-old memory. Soon she'd tell Kit what she was doing and Kit, her wise and loving sister, would understand. But would she? Gemma put the soap back in its container and splashed warm water up and around her face and neck.

The bathroom door suddenly slammed shut with a terrific double bang and Gemma jumped in fright. She sat up in the bath, frozen in shock, her heart racing. Why had it happened? She grabbed a towel, wrapped it round her, stepped out of the bath and opened the door. She peeped round. Everything was still. The bedroom was just as she'd left it, tangled bedclothes, a pillow on the floor, the champagne bottle. She went to the doorway between the bedroom and the lounge area and looked over at the entrance door. It was

firmly shut. She stood there a moment, not breathing. There was nowhere for anyone to hide in the lounge area. It felt empty. She went back to the bathroom and slid back into the hot water. But her mind wouldn't leave the incident alone. Why had the bathroom door suddenly shut? Nothing happens without a reason. I've been out of the job for five years, she thought, and I'm even more suspicious now than I was when I was a cop. Maybe it was something to do with physics, or convection, explained in terms of hot and cold air and the creation of high and low pressure areas. She tried relaxing back into the water but the fright had unsettled her so she pulled the plug, stepped out and dried herself down. She couldn't find her knickers anywhere and had to crawl underneath the bedcovers to retrieve her bra.

She would go home and get her costume, go for a quick dip to clear her head, grab a coffee and a croissant and then face whatever the day would bring.

She walked into the lounge area to retrieve the rest of her clothes, but stopped short in the doorway. A chill of fear rippled through her body as hair follicles, obeying a primitive directive, stiffened. She felt the rush of adrenalin; that explosion of icy fire. Now she understood why her clothes had looked almost laid out when she'd glanced without attention earlier.

They'd been laid out all right. She covered her mouth with a hand as if to silence herself from making some shocked noise. Oh Jesus, she thought. Kit was right. This was not fun. This was horrible. I've gone to bed with a weirdo. She stood there a moment more, taking it all in, the clothes, the talcum powder, the tatters. Then she rushed to check her bag in the drawer beside the bed. Nothing was missing. The eighty dollars she remembered from last night were folded safely in her wallet, as was the business card of the

man she'd picked up. The video camera was still safe in its bag. She picked it up and returned to her clothes in the lounge room. Using the slow panning technique that had been so much part of her crime scene work when she was a cop, and was still important in her security operations, she recorded every nasty detail.

Fortunately, it had been raining yesterday morning, so she was able to cover herself with the raincoat she'd been wearing and drive home. She made her way through the early morning traffic of the Cross and eastern suburbs as quickly as possible, her skirt, panties, pantyhose, blouse and jumper carefully stored in the large sheet of white paper she'd managed to beg from the hotel's kitchen.

As she put the key to the deadlock of her flat, Gemma noticed that her fingers were trembling. Noel had wired the front door lock and the alarm system together so that unlocking the door also disarmed the electronic shriek. A square of envelope showed under next door's door and she wondered briefly if the Ratbag and his mother were away. She walked into her flat to the stink of flowering stocks going bad in a vase and Taxi running cross-leggedly over the polished boards to greet her, calling for breakfast, with his tail straight up in the air. She placed the wrapped-up clothes on the hall table and seized him, snuggling her chin into his marmalade fur, holding on to him for comfort. 'Oh, you cat,' she told him. 'You straight-tailed, orange-flavoured cat.' Her heartbeat was easing but he picked up her distress and struggled against her, so she let him plop heavily onto the floor again. Her mother's beautiful face shone from a silver-framed photograph and next to that was the collection of dainty miniature porcelain dolls, seven of them, standing along the back of the sideboard like a line-up. She'd lost

interest in collecting them by the seventh. I think I might give them away, she thought. But maybe, one day, I'll have a daughter. That day seemed a very long way off. And the sight of her mother's face renewed the guilt she was feeling about keeping secrets from Kit. She pushed the guilt away. Damn it, she was a free woman, and could do what she wished. Automatically, she fingered the silver chain around her neck that had been her mother's, seized the vase of stocks and took them out to the kitchen, treading on huge squares of sunshine on the wooden floors.

Beyond the lounge area, and through the locked wrought-iron lace doors of the balcony, the royal navy Pacific unfolded along the rocks and sand of Tamarama beach under a hazy powder blue sky. The sun had been up for nearly two hours and it was going to be a magnificent October day.

The building she lived in had been an old house, divided in the 'sixties into four asymmetrical flats. She'd bought hers for under three hundred thousand four years ago, just before real estate went crazy in the area. The moment she'd moved in, the wrought-iron grilles had gone up on the doors and windows.

Gemma wanted to ring Kit but knew this was her meditation time. 'I get to feel at one with the universe,' she used to say to Kit, 'sitting in surveillance vans on cold dark nights freezing my tits off.'

She put the kettle on in the sunny kitchen, scraped the last of a tin of pilchards onto Taxi's plate and went through the lounge area to her pale blue office. The dining and lounge area were all blue and white, fresh as September sunshine. In the hallway, opposite the table and mirror where the vase of stocks had been, was a glazed Della Robbia Madonna and child, surrounded by fruit and vegetables and specially selected by her for its perfect blue. She looked in the mirror

briefly. Where Kit had the sweet-shaped Lincoln face of their mother, and her dark hair, Gemma took after the father's line with her strong chin and deep-set grey eyes. Currently, she was a dark blonde. She looked around her place and thought how much she loved the simplicity of polished floors, delft blue walls, white curtains, and touches of golden wood.

In her office, the tones were more businesslike, less Mediterranean. White surfaces held the computer, printer and fax, and the shredder stood in a corner next to her white desk on the dark blue carpet. She had a music system that she rarely used apart from the radio. This room faced west, but because the old house was down below road level with a ferny garden at the front, her office was protected from the western sun. There were several messages on the answering service that would need her attention after she'd made a call on her mobile. As she dialled and waited, she glanced at the time.

'Hullo,' Lance's voice on the answering service said, 'the office of PAL is currently unattended. Please leave your name and number and your call will be returned.' Paradigm was about the only private lab that did this sort of work and she didn't want to use the Institute out at Lidcombe; couldn't bear to think of her ruined knickers pinned out like a big square butterfly on a blotting paper board by someone who might remember her name. She knew Lance from her days in the job.

'Lance,' she spoke to the message machine, 'it's Gemma Lincoln. Seven forty-five, Wednesday morning. I need you to do a DNA test on some material. I'll courier it over to you this morning. I'll get you a sample to match it against as soon as I can. Thanks.' She rang off and placed the wrapped up clothes in a postal bag. She rang the security courier and twenty minutes later, the parcel was collected.

Gemma attended to the messages on the answering machine. The last one was from the retired Detective Sergeant living up the coast. As she dialled his number, she thought about the conversation she'd had with him over a month ago.

'I remember your father's case very well,' Philip Hawker had said. 'It feels like it happened last summer, not thirty years ago.'

Gemma had taken a deep breath. 'I want to have another look at the brief,' she'd said. 'I believe he's an innocent man. I'm looking to re-open the case.'

There had been a long silence on the other end of the line. 'He was convicted of an extremely savage crime. The evidence was—'

'The evidence was all circumstantial,' Gemma interrupted, 'and based on bloodstain interpretation. I want to see the brief,' she said. 'Do you know where it would be?'

'Could be anywhere. In those days we sent the police briefs off to the office of the Clerk of the Peace, after the committal hearing. That office doesn't even exist any more. It's the DPP now.'

'Can you suggest where it might be?'

'You could start with the DPP. They might know. Or State Archives. But the brief might still be with the court papers. Or with the police. Or in somebody's chook house.'

'What do you mean "chook house"?'

'I mean that quite literally. The old Hat Factory has long gone. Where the old CIB used to be. When the paperwork was transferred to the new premises, an awful lot was chucked. Briefs are supposed to be kept until a couple of years after the end of the person's sentence. But that didn't always happen. Sometimes, police took briefs or bits of them with them when they retired, especially if it had been their big case.'

'That sounds very unsatisfactory,' said Gemma, remembering her own experience in the job.

'That was in the olden days,' he said. 'I'm sure things are all in order now.' The irony was almost undetectable.

'Did you,' asked Gemma, 'take things with you?'

'I might have a few odds and ends up here,' Hawker had replied after a pause. 'I'll have a look and get back to you.' She was hoping he'd had a look and was getting back to her when the man himself finally answered the phone.

'Yes,' he said, after the initial greetings. 'I've found some things that you might be interested in. I've even got a copy of your father's original statement here. The one he did on the night of the killing.'

'The one he made for the police?'

'No,' said Philip Hawker. 'I don't know where that one is. This one's a bit unusual. Apparently he sat down and wrote this after he'd come home from the hospital before we came to take him down to the station. He told me it was so that he could write down the events while they were fresh in his mind.' Like writing up his case notes, thought Gemma. Some deep pang assailed her as she thought of her father, sitting down and writing up the events of that night. She blinked rapidly.

'I've never known anyone else do that,' Philip Hawker was saying. 'To write something down off their own bat.'

'My father was a professional man,' Gemma said, aware of the beating of her heart. 'He was used to writing things down. Can you fax it to me?'

'Yes, but not until I go into town.' He laughed. 'We don't have those sorts of mod cons in Sleepy Hollow. It'll be quicker if I pop it in the mail. What's your address?' Gemma gave it. 'Have you turned up anything else?' Hawker asked her.

'I've been flat out,' she said. 'But I'm hoping to get everything together soon.'

'You should come up here for a few days,' he said. 'Unwind a bit.'

'If I unwound . . .' Gemma started to say, but she couldn't think of what might happen if she did so she said goodbye and rang off.

She had no appetite but made a cup of tea and some toast spread with Salvation Jane honey, then took them out to the balcony. Today, the sea was sapphire and diamonds in the breeze, under a powder blue sky. These sorts of details were still automatic, she realised, the result of years of contemporaneous note-making, necessary in her work, essential in the face of cross-examination. Maybe I should call the police, she thought, as the horrible discovery of this morning loomed into her imagination again. But it was not a serious thought. She didn't have a very high opinion of many of her ex-colleagues and she couldn't bear the thought of some smart little junior detective with his eyes everywhere taking her statement and silently drawing conclusions.

What would happen if I unwound? she asked herself. 'You need to take a break,' Kit kept saying to her. 'You haven't had a holiday for years. You drive yourself. That is not the way to deal with the demons. You need to sit down with them. Give them a cup of tea. Let them tell you what they've been wanting to tell you all these years.' And Kit would give her that look.

'Don't give me that therap*iste* look!' Gemma would yell, trying to keep her tone good-natured. 'I won't have it! Stop *big sistering* me!' Maybe it was time to own up to Kit about what she was doing. Sometimes she even spoke out loud to the large photo of a smiling Kit that hung above the television set.

She washed her plate and cup and stacked them on the draining board, wondering when her father's statement might arrive. In her office, she opened the bottom drawer of her desk and pulled out the envelope containing a yellowing newspaper clipping from the old Sydney *Sun*.

'*Crucial murder evidence "possibly possum"*' was the heading. Gemma read it once again, although she almost knew it by heart.

> Housewife and mother, Imelda Moresby, next-door neighbour of Dr Archie Chisholm, Northcliffe Avenue, Killara, NSW, today gave evidence of hearing a noise on the evening of Wednesday, 17th September 1967, the night of the murder of Dr Chisholm's wife, Marianne. 'About twenty-five minutes or so before I heard Dr Chisholm's car returning to the house,' Mrs Moresby, attractive mother of two, told the court today, 'I was getting the baby ready for the ten o'clock feed when a noise made me go to the window and look into the Chisholms' backyard.' In answer to further questioning, Mrs Moresby said she didn't hear or see anything else unusual that night. Dr Chisholm's car arrived 'about twenty-five minutes or half an hour later'.
>
> Dr Chisholm, well-known Sydney psychiatrist, is standing trial for the brutal murder of his wife, Marianne. Dr Chisholm told the court he found his wife dying in their home when he arrived home from a university dinner at ten-thirty pm. Under Crown cross-examination, Mrs Moresby admitted the noise she heard 'could have been a possum'. Witnesses have confirmed that Dr Chisholm's Rover did not return to the house until at least ten-thirty pm that night.

Gemma put the brittle piece of paper back in its envelope.

It was the only thing concerning her father she had ever found at Aunt Merle's, in the bottom of a sewing basket, carefully folded up so that she'd almost missed it, thinking it was nothing more than a paper of pins. She had a memory, or perhaps it was only the memory of a memory, of sitting with Kit in a bay window seat, on red velvet cushions with gold tassels at somebody's house, watching a storm coming down and looking at the rain beating against the windows, crying and wanting to go home, and Kit comforting her by making her watch the raindrops to guess which one got to the bottom of the glass first.

Gemma made a brew of strong coffee and took a couple of painkillers washed down with Berocca, although the hangover seemed to have been eclipsed by the more serious recent events. The ring of her doorbell at 9 o'clock made her jump. Still affected by the early morning shock, she went to the door, checked out her visitor and let her in. The woman nervously looked around as Gemma ushered her into her office. Rose Georgiou was a slight woman, too thin, with a soft pretty face. She wore a dark rosewood lipstick that did nothing for her pallor. Bit by bit Gemma extracted the whole story out of the weeping woman. She suspected her husband had rekindled an old love affair, one he'd promised was over.

Gemma automatically pushed the box of tissues towards her. Sometimes I feel like I'm doing your job, she once told Kit. People tell me their most intimate secrets. I listen. And I help them. Mostly, they already know the truth. Mercator's report and videos are just the last nail in the coffin.

The two-way suddenly crackled into life. 'Tracker Three to base, copy please.'

It was Spinner. Gemma pressed her two-way into service. 'Tracker Three, hullo. Where are you?' She looked across

at Mrs Georgiou, who was putting a tiny hankie back in her bag and blinking her eyes in an effort to stop further tears. 'Excuse me,' Gemma said to her, turning back to the two-way.

'I'm on the F4, travelling east,' Spinner's voice said. 'Our target opened the shop and I waited to see in case she took anything out to the car before the rest of the staff arrived. Nothing happened so there's no point in me staying here until she closes up again this evening. I'm heading back to put in a few hours on the stress-related pastry eater and then I'll get on to the Bondi job. I'll call you later.' Like Noel, Spinner always had several jobs on the boil.

'Okay Spinner. I'll hear from you later.' Gemma put the two-way down and gave her full attention to the other woman, who was anxiously frowning. 'But what if my husband finds out? What if he knows he's being followed?'

Gemma shook her head. 'It's never happened,' she said. It had, Gemma thought, but only once. It was almost not a lie. If a subject got wary, the operators got warier. Dropped off him for a month or more then came back with a different vehicle, different operator sometimes. More vehicle changes, more changes of operator, more changes of clothes. Spinner was an absolute genius at remaining unseen. He had a nose for surveillance work; a combination of instinct and common sense, the sort of genius that makes a great street cop. He could sit in his utility with the tinted windows recording away on the video camera and remain completely unnoticed.

Gemma suggested they start the surveillance straight away. 'Our operator can pick him up at lunch time. If he's meeting someone, we'll know. We'll tell you where he goes. We'll pick him up again on Friday night after work. If we haven't got anything by the time you've spent five hundred

dollars,' she told Rose, 'we'll review the situation. We'll start tomorrow if that's all right with you.'

She was confident they'd nail him if Friday was his night for playing. Rose nodded and Gemma showed her out of the house, noticing that the envelope under next door's mat had gone. When she returned to her office, Gemma opened a new file and was writing up the details given her by Rose Georgiou when the phone rang.

'Gemma? Just got your package,' Lance said. 'But there's no name with it. Whose clothes are these?'

'Mine,' she said. There was a silence.

'What happened?'

'None of your business.' She laughed to take the sting out of the words and again there was an uneasy silence between them.

'Is it urgent?'

'Yes,' she said. 'I'll get the sample over to you today.' He rang off.

She pulled a business card out of her wallet and phoned the man of last night. 'Hullo, Brian,' she said, using her bimbo voice. 'It's Gemma. Remember me?'

'I've got the marks to show it,' he said, flirting. He didn't sound like a pervert, she thought, deciding to go in like a bulldozer. 'Brian, there was an assault on me at the motel early this morning. The police need a sample from you so as to eliminate you from their inquiries.' The lie was easy; she'd delivered that line so often in ten years in the job.

'What are you talking about, assault? What sample? Are you all right?' The concern sounded genuine. Either he's a very good liar, Gemma thought, or he hasn't got a clue what I'm talking about.

'I'm all right,' she said. 'The police have told me to say nothing at the moment. All you have to do is go to Paradigm

Analysis Laboratories sometime today.' She gave the address. 'Just a little swab around the mouth with a cotton bud and that's all there is to it. Then you're out of the picture.' Or not, she thought, depending on how the match turns out. 'It's all completely confidential.'

'But I don't understand.' You don't have to understand, she could almost hear herself saying. Just fucking do it. Instead, she adopted her reasonable, pleasant voice. 'The police have some body – some bloodstains – from the offender. They want to eliminate you from their inquiries. Just do this little thing and that's the end of it.'

'Look,' he said, 'I don't want to get mixed up in anything.' His voice was really alarmed now. Maybe he *was* the one, the psycho who'd done that to her clothes.

'You won't be mixed up in anything if you do this small thing,' said Gemma. 'You wouldn't want to be a suspect in an assault case, would you?'

'God, no,' he said. 'Okay, I'll do it. I don't want any trouble.'

Gemma said goodbye and hung up. You got trouble the minute you started putting the work on me last night, she thought. The radio crackled and it was Spinner speaking from his vehicle at Artarmon. 'I've put Mr Crookback to bed,' he said. 'I've got some good video of him working night shift. Casual shelf packer. Bending and stretching like a yogi. I'll fax my report through, then I'm going to grab a couple hours' sleep.'

'Sweet dreams,' Gemma said. 'Call in when you're ready. I've got a new job for you.'

After a few minutes, the fax came alive and Gemma read Spinner's contemporaneous report. They had Mr Crookback cold.

Gemma rang her sister; she wanted Kit's comfort and help. She realised she was still very shaken up.

'It's me, hi,' said Gemma. 'I've got something I want to show you, and I don't want to talk about it over the phone. When are you free?'

'What about tonight?' asked her sister.

TWO

Kit replaced the handset and stood up from where she'd been squatting because there wasn't a table for the phone in the front room yet. She thought she heard footsteps outside the house, as if someone were walking around to the back door.

'Gerald?' she called, going down the hallway towards the kitchen. 'Is that you?'

She went to the back door and looked around, almost expecting to see her husband, but there was no one there. She had long ago given up the idea that Will might return to her, a healthy, happy Will. Sometimes in dreams she still saw his boyish figure, luminous and transparent, a long way from her. Sometimes she still thought she saw him, crossing the road or walking out of a shop, and she'd hasten forward, only to find that it wasn't him but someone else's son, tall, handsome, healthy.

Her small garden was quiet and empty. Curious, she thought, stepping outside and going to the wall at the end of the garden, standing on tiptoe to look over. The wide blue expanse to the southeast and the houses and bushland on the opposite side of the bay were all she could see, so she climbed up on the gate from where she could survey the path that wound south around the coast past Coogee beach

and Lurline Bay to Maroubra. Except for a young woman leading a dog, she saw no one. On checking, she found the gate in the left-hand side passage standing wide open. Kit frowned and closed it behind her. She was sure it had been closed before and now she lived alone she was doubly cautious. The final end to her marriage eighteen months ago, the resultant divorce had left huge psychic wounds, great black holes all around and within her; voids filled with the anti-matter of ex-matrimony. Negative relationship is as powerful as positive, she knew. She walked to the front of the house and looked around. All she could see was the light morning traffic on the road and some kids walking past on their way to school. Maybe one of the kids had ducked in chasing a ball, she thought. She retraced her steps and went down to the other side gate and back inside again. I must be imagining things, she thought to herself. An empty house magnifies sound. Perhaps it was something from next door. She rinsed her breakfast things and put them away. But her mind was on the wide open side door – a breach in her boundaries – and she decided to get a padlock for both side gates. She put on a CD, and the ghosts were laid to rest for a while by a Beethoven string quartet.

As Gemma drove to meet Noel she noticed a good-looking blond youth crossing the road. He looked like Will had before he'd become so sick. She remembered the painful access she'd had to the lives of Kit, Gerald and Will, and the way Will had been so excluded from his parents' private suffering. She remembered him aimlessly wandering around the big house, miserable, with his mother and father locked in silent combat; Gerald depressed and Kit smouldering over the fact that her husband wouldn't seek help. Sometimes Will would appear on her doorstep, a forlorn schoolboy, dragging

his school bag. 'Can I stay here for a few days?' he'd ask. She'd ring Kit and Kit, preoccupied with Gerald, would hardly notice that her son wasn't yet home from school. That had been seven or eight years ago, and Gemma would never forget Will's loneliness. With her, Will could open up just a little bit. 'They can't hear me,' he'd said to her. 'Some days I just want to die and Mum goes on about how important the HSC is. And how I've got to apply myself to my studies. My whole fucking life is falling apart from the inside, I want to talk to them about how I'm thinking of suicide sometimes. And they want to talk about studying for the HSC.'

At the Burnie Street Deli, where the smell of coffee and the sound of Triple J filtered out onto the footpath, Tracker Two looked up from his table as Gemma came in, uncrossing his long legs and straightening his powerful frame. Noel Storey was in the middle of writing up a report but he tucked it away as Gemma approached. The coffee aroma didn't stir her appetite today.

'Hi, Boss,' he said as she sat beside him. 'What've you got for me?'

'I've found you a great rooftop,' Gemma said. 'To keep an eye on that fuel depot.'

Noel grunted. Sitting on a flat roof with binoculars, camera and laptop all day was never fun. And at night it was worse, she knew. Weird shapes loomed in the darkness.

'You've been a bit hard to get lately,' he was saying. 'You've got something on your mind. Is it the business?'

'It's nothing,' she said, feeling guilty. It was, but she could hardly tell Noel about her motel habit. Despite the warmth of the cafe, she felt cold as she remembered her clothes laid out on the floor.

'Don't forget,' he was saying, 'we've got to go down to Cross Weld Construction sometime in the next few days.'

'Holy shit,' said Gemma, wondering how she could've forgotten. Suddenly she was focused again. The construction company, dealing in the wholesaling, retailing, warehousing and distribution of building materials and tools, was their biggest customer so far. She remembered the owner, Richard Cross, saying on the phone that he'd heard excellent reports of Mercator Business Services and had decided to give the contract to her small firm rather than one of the big three even though it was quite some way out of his area.

'He's closing the place down next week for two weeks' annual holidays,' said Gemma, remembering the brief, 'and that's when we move in and do the job.' She pulled her diary out of her bag and found the entry and the date. 'He wants covert cameras installed,' she said, 'and sensor lights. He suspects his 2IC is involved with a group taking stuff worth thousands out of the warehouse every month but he hasn't been able to prove anything.' With her pen, she drew a circle around the Cross Weld Construction entry in the diary. 'While he's closed and renovating, we get down there with our little bits and pieces. I'll come down with you early next week when you do the initial inspection. I want to give this fellow my personal touch. It's our biggest job to date. Mr Cross is hoping to run as an Independent in the next state elections. He told me on the phone. He seemed very pleased with himself.'

'Camden's a long way out of our area,' Noel said. 'I wonder why he doesn't get someone closer to home.'

'Just be grateful,' said Gemma. 'The Cross Weld Construction deposit has paid your wages and Spinner's for the last few weeks.'

'I love the bloke,' said Noel.

'Drop by my place sometime today or tomorrow,' she said. 'I'll have your cheque made up for you.'

The two sisters sat in the kitchen later that night eating Kit's vegetarian moussaka, creamy with bechamel sauce. Her older sister looked pale and tired, Gemma thought, with shadows under her dark eyes. Her fine brown hair was drawn back and twisted up with a hair clip, but two gleaming wings had escaped and looped on each side of her fine, unmade-up face. The break-up with Gerald has taken its toll, Gemma thought. But it had to end – it is almost impossible to live with a deeply depressed partner, day after day, night after night. 'You look like Emily Brontë,' she said to Kit, reaching out and patting her cheek softly with two fingertips.

'I feel more like Grendel's mother,' Kit laughed. And Gemma suddenly felt free of the fear and disgust that had infected the day. It was good to be sharing a meal with her sister. And soon Steve would be back. Soon it would be time to show Kit the video, but she tried to put it off a while longer.

'Show me round,' she asked. Kit showed her through the rooms of the house, pausing briefly in front of the photo of Will. Gemma picked it up. 'He was so beautiful,' she said, touching the laughing face. Kit took it from her and put it back on the mantelpiece and Gemma saw that her sister was unable to speak. By the time they'd reached the kitchen door, Kit had collected herself. 'This is the best bit,' she said as they stepped outside into the evening. 'The walled garden with the gate. And beyond it.' Light fell from the windows, lighting up the area near the house while the rest of the garden hid in deeper shadows. They went into the darkness and looked south over the stone wall past canna lilies that blazed crimson against the blue of Gordon's Bay when it was day. The sound

of a soft surf filled the night. 'The boats are pulled up over there,' Kit pointed out to Gemma. 'Come over during the day next time.'

Gemma jumped down and turned back to the overgrown garden. 'I don't like it,' she said. 'It's too exposed. Anything – anyone could come over the wall.'

Gemma sat for a moment, trailing her fingers in the water, then she noticed the overgrown pond.

'I intend to clean that up,' said Kit, pulling away several runners of ivy to partly reveal a classical stone face set in the wall. They went into the front lounge room, where stacks of books teetered and half-emptied boxes filled up one corner. Outside, crickets sang in morse code. It had to be done, thought Gemma. I can't put it off any longer. 'Something awful happened to me last night,' she finally said as she sipped on the coffee, sitting on the floor, leaning back against the wall. Kit sat nearby, curled on a large cushion. Taking a deep breath, Gemma told the story.

'I'm almost a hundred per cent sure it wasn't the fellow I picked up last night,' she said after she'd finished. 'He gave a sample to the lab this afternoon and I'll have the result in the next day or so.'

'But,' said Kit, 'how could anyone else have got in?' She went back to the kitchen, returning with two dishes of homemade vanilla bean ice-cream.

'I've been thinking,' Gemma said as she took the spoon her sister handed her. 'There was a sort of double bang when the bathroom door slammed shut this morning. I reckon Brian – that's the fellow – didn't close the entrance door properly. I've got a horrible feeling that my door was open from about four when he left.' She shivered at the thought of it.

'That's what you do, my Gems,' said Kit, looking her in the eye. 'You leave doors open. And the hell beings can slip in.'

'*I* didn't leave the goddam door open.'

'You brought a stranger back with you who did.'

Gemma could feel herself starting to get angry. There was no point in arguing with Kit. There never had been. And even when Gemma had the last word, which was quite often because it was not Kit's habit to argue, her own words often hung in the air, accusing her in the ensuing silence. For a second or two she felt rebelliously triumphant about the secret she was keeping from Kit. You don't know everything, Miss Cleverdick Psychothera*piste*, said a childish part of her mind. 'If I run the video now,' she said sharply, 'maybe it will spoil your appetite even for vanilla bean ice-cream.'

'Darling Gemfish. If you'd heard what I heard today from one of my clients, you'd know that a mere videotape could never interfere with my appetite. Put it on.'

Gemma went over and pressed the Play button. The quality of the tape was very good; Gemma's establishing shots showed the motel room, the cream and mushroom pink furnishings, the low smoked glass coffee table and lounge chairs, the entrance door. Then the clothes on the floor in their context. Gemma heard Kit's sharp intake of breath. Gemma's clothes had been laid out to make a sort of effigy of a woman: her blouse lying neatly with the skirt spread out beneath it and, on top of that, her panties and pantyhose, with talcum powder sprinkled where the armpits and the crutch might have been. Her shoes lay spreadeagled at the end of the pantyhose's feet. But what was so shocking, was the way the neck of the blouse had been savaged, slashed to ribbons, and the crutch of the pantyhose slashed. And right on target, in the ravaged crutch of the panties, was the sticky wet patch of talcum powder and semen, gluing the nylon to the fabric of the slashed skirt beneath. Whatever knife he'd used had cut right through the carpet, revealing the particle

board of the floor under the neck of her blouse, the crutch of the pantyhose.

'Oh dear,' said Kit. 'This is very bad.'

'What do you think?' said Gemma.

'I think you're right. It won't be the man you took back to the hotel with you. This one needs slashing and ripping to get aroused – it's possible he can't have sex with a woman in the normal run of things, that he can only approach a woman's clothes, not a woman.'

'Jesus, Kit. He came pretty damn close. He was there and *I was asleep*. When I think of that going on just a few metres away – it makes me feel sick.' Her stomach turned upside down and she swallowed hard. 'What if he'd used the knife on me?'

Kit turned to look squarely at her. 'He didn't. He could've and he didn't.'

There was a silence while Gemma thought of the knife that hadn't been used on her. Then Kit spoke again. 'What are you going to do?'

'I'll talk to Angie. See if she's heard of anything similar to this around town.'

'I meant what are you going to do about *you*? About keeping yourself safe.'

Gemma pushed a button on the remote control. Her violated clothes shimmered in freeze frame haze. 'You're thinking that he might know who I am,' she said. 'That it mightn't have been just a random attack.'

'Even if it was at the beginning,' said Kit, 'he might well have found out who you are. If he's played around with your clothes like that, he may well have gone to your bag, seen your ID. It could fit in with his sense of having a real woman, knowing your identity.'

Gemma snapped. 'I know how to keep myself safe.'

'If you'll forgive the complete contradiction, you do not.'

'I'm not one of your clients, Kit.'

'Gems, I'm your sister. I love you and care about you. If you were one of my clients, I'd make you do a contract with me. When you felt the urge to go out and mindlessly pick up some fellow, I'd make you ring me first and we'd talk about what was going on in you that you were avoiding.'

'Hell, Kit,' said Gemma. 'What am I supposed to be avoiding? I just get restless. It's like a big work-out for me.'

'It's anxiety,' said Kit, 'that you've never learned to contain. It drives you.' She paused. 'Just for interest's sake, next time you feel like you have to have your "work-out"—'

'What?' Gemma interrupted gracelessly.

'I was going to suggest that you don't do it. That you just be aware of what happens in you. I think you'll be interested at what might come up.'

'You make me sound so *pathological*. Girls just wanna have fun.' In the silence that followed, with her slashed clothing shimmering in freeze frame, Gemma wished she could unsay the flippant remark.

'How's Steve?' Kit asked after a silence.

Gemma scooped up a drop of ice-cream on her finger and licked it. 'He's good. He'll be back next week. He managed to make a phone call to me. He's doing one of his cloak and dagger numbers.'

Steve was a cop with a laid-back, casual nature, thought Kit, an energy that knows how to blend in and merge with others. But there was something in him that troubled her; an evasiveness, something not quite right. She knew he did undercover work quite frequently. Are people who are drawn to that sort of work people of secrets, undercover people with undercover souls? At present, Steve was interstate, having

infiltrated a group who made and dealt amphetamines and other designer drugs. 'You care about Steve, don't you?' said Kit, watching her younger sister. 'You like him a lot. I can tell.'

Gemma grinned. 'I do,' she said, 'but don't ever tell him.'

'Oh Gems.'

'Don't "Oh Gems" me,' said the other, standing up, getting ready to go.

'With our history,' said Kit very carefully, 'with our father, we both of us need to be very careful about the men we're drawn to – or who are drawn to us. The relationship we had or, in our case, couldn't have, with the father is how we will attempt to relate with the man.'

'Stop *therapating* at me. I know all that.' Gemma was irritated.

'No,' said Kit. 'You *don't* know. You only know in your head.'

Gemma walked to the front door and Kit followed. 'So what *did* you hear from one of your clients today?' Gemma asked.

'His mother used to force him to eat food that he hated and when he vomited it up, she beat him to make him eat the vomit.' She glanced at her younger sister. 'You did ask,' she added.

'Mother love,' said Gemma.

They walked up to the roadside at the front of the house and, behind them, the Pacific swung in and out of Gordon's Bay, resonating up the road.

Kit blew her sister a kiss through the window as Gemma pulled away from the curb. She watched the car turn the corner and then returned to her house, locking the door behind her. The house felt even stranger at night and the high

ceilings held shadows that crowded in the corners. Mother love, she was thinking, and the memory of her own mother came to her. The work she'd put in during the last few years had greatly diminished the power of the monstrous event that had so dominated the sisters' early lives. Memories of her mother ambushed her with a great rush of tears. She found herself hunched over the sink, suddenly sobbing hard into the washing up. My poor family, she thought. Poor us.

She made her way through the maze of still unopened boxes. So far, she'd unpacked most of the kitchen and the spare furnishings for the therapy room. On the mantelpiece she'd placed a few bodywork books for clients to borrow, a vase made by a potter friend, some pieces of coral and the perfectly smooth egg-shaped marble rock she'd picked up on a beach in Cyprus. Its pristine and natural perfection always pleased her. The photograph of Will went into her bedroom together with the candle she lit in front of it every night. Before she went to bed Kit checked that all the windows and doors were secure.

THREE

Next morning, Gemma went for a walk around the beach to Bronte. She was so preoccupied she hardly noticed the sea swirling in layers of aqua and dark green brocade along the rocky cliffs. She had a coffee at one of the several cafes, read the paper and came home. As she walked down the steps towards her front door, she barked her shin painfully on something and looked down to see the Ratbag's bike sprawled across the path. She grabbed it angrily and wheeled it to his front door, propping it up against the wall.

Inside, she slid the doors to the timber deck open and then half closed them because the southerly was strong and the Ratbag was standing out on the grass near the bushes. He didn't notice her; his skinny ten-year-old body was slightly hunched forward as he watched something closely. 'Hey,' she yelled out to him through the half-closed sliding door, 'I fell over your damn bike again.'

He turned around and looked at her, then his eyes ducked away from her furtively.

'I could have broken a leg.'

'But you didn't,' he replied reasonably, returning her gaze now, the dark fringe over his eyes lifting in the strong wind.

'No thanks to you,' she yelled, slamming the sliding door

shut as Taxi skittered across the floor, frightened by the sudden noise. Bloody kid, she thought. Last Christmas she'd found a year's supply of plastic-wrapped school lunches rotting in the bushes at the edge of the cliff. 'What do you do for lunch?' she'd asked him one afternoon when they'd met on the steps. 'Don't tell Mum,' he'd said, twigging immediately. I've still got that over him, she thought as she went in. Two hundred rotting lunches must be worth something at the negotiating table.

She had a shower, dressed and was eating toast and ginger marmalade when Spinner knocked on the door. It was very rare that he or Noel came to the office; their work was on the road. She let him in, poured him a coffee and gave him the details on Andrew Georgiou and the two photographs. Gemma often gave thanks that Spinner had grown too big to be the jockey he'd trained to be. Instead, he rode the highways and the byways in his nondescript grey utility, armed with his video camera and his laptop, watching and waiting, writing down his sharp reports.

'You okay?' he asked, studying her with his shrewd eyes.

Gemma shrugged. 'Bad night last night. I didn't sleep too well.'

Spinner shook his head. 'There's something going on with you lately. You're up to something.'

Gemma frequently wished that the men around her were more like the average bloke – unseeing, unobservant, unaware. It was difficult to hide anything from the likes of Steve, Noel and Spinner. These were men who listened and noticed closely.

'What do you mean "up to something"?' she asked. Spinner just raised a thin eyebrow, looked away and started studying the photographs again.

They had coffee on the balcony. The Ratbag had vanished,

possibly to school, and it was a glittering morning with the sea and sky blinding blue ahead of them; in the southwest, towering cumulus was already gathering.

Spinner put the photos in a folder Gemma had given him. 'I've tracked down Imelda Moresby for you,' he said, and a note of pride alerted Gemma that there was something else going on.

'Oh really?' she asked casually, to hide a beating heart. 'And what have you found?'

'I've found it's a very small world,' said Spinner, teasing her. 'And there's a healing service on tomorrow night.' Spinner belonged to a charismatic church where they praised the Lord and spoke in tongues and did a lot of healing and clairvoyance, whether you liked it or not. He enjoyed quoting scripture in his good-humoured way and Gemma usually didn't mind.

'Some other time, Bede,' she said, the rare use of his name a warning.

'Some other time never comes,' said Spinner, grinning wickedly. 'The time of the Lord is at hand.'

'Tell me more about Mrs Moresby.'

'I am,' said Spinner, 'and you're not listening. What I'm telling you is that the woman who lived next door to you when you were a kid turns out to be a very well-known spiritual healer and she's appearing tomorrow night at the Lindfield church.'

For a moment, Gemma had a wild image of an apparition, floating on a cloud in a grotto with a gold rose on each foot, like the Virgin of Fatima. 'What on earth does all that mean?' she asked. 'Appearing? You'll need to break it up into sections for me.'

Spinner nodded, grinning. 'I knew the Lord would get you. He moves in mysterious ways. Now you'll have to

come and watch her in action. She's terrific. She's got a very good reputation.' He was suddenly serious. 'So what's your interest in her?'

Gemma excused herself and returned with the yellowing news clipping. Spinner read it and then looked up at her; he already knew the outline of her family history. He looked down at the news item again. 'You want to talk to her about that night.' Gemma nodded. 'But like she said,' stated Spinner, indicating the clipping, 'it might have just been a possum.'

'Or the real killer forcing the dining room doors. They were french doors with an old-fashioned box lock. They'd been jemmied.'

'Thirty years later, she mightn't remember much.'

'That's what I want to find out,' said Gemma. 'I want to talk to her.' She couldn't really explain to Spinner, because she couldn't understand herself, why she had this strong desire to meet with anyone connected to that night. No doubt Kit would have some ideas, she thought impatiently.

They finished the coffee and she stood, looking out to sea. 'Could be a storm later,' she said, noting the haze on the horizon and the cumulus building like massive cauliflowers in the southeast as she gathered up the coffee cups.

Spinner left to start work. Bede McNamara, one of the best, she thought. She was rinsing the cups when the phone rang.

'Mr Brian Bates, who so kindly donated some very nice cheek cells to us yesterday,' said Lance, 'has only one chance in nineteen million of belonging to that semen.'

'Thanks, Lance. That's a relief,' said Gemma. I didn't bring a loony back to the hotel with me after all, she thought. Relief softened her.

She rang off and dialled Angie McDonald, who wasn't

in, so she left a message for her at Homicide. Then she locked up, went outside, got into her car, turned the radio on very loudly to Triple M and started the drive into town. *'It's a long way to the top,'* she screamed along, *'if you wanna rock and roll.'* Across the green of Queens Park, she could see the towers of the city through a scumble of pollution. Her unease increased; the horrible memories of her slashed underwear and skirt and the secret she was hiding from her sister circled round in her mind. She sang louder.

Kit drove home from a visit to Alexander Covell, her erstwhile therapist and now supervisor. She'd told Alexander about her new client, Clive Mindell, mentioning his structure, the way he swung between arrogance and something that was almost a cringe. They'd talked of ways of dealing with this client's structural rigidities and defences. Alexander's last words were going through her mind. 'Practise being aware of your blind spots. That's where we get into trouble as therapists. Not to mention as human beings.' Kit went over the conversation again. 'Watch that new client of yours,' he reminded her. 'Pay special attention to the moment before the cringe,' he said. 'And remember the safety rules.'

She'd laughed and started to recite them. 'Never let the client place himself between me and the door,' she said.

'And?'

'And always watch the hands. The hands move first,' she'd recited as Alexander patted her own before she drove away.

Now as she turned onto the road that would take her back to her place, a memory from thirty years ago tried to push itself into her consciousness. Kit switched the radio on and distracted herself by singing along, quite badly, to the last of the 'Four Last Songs' and noticing the run-over body of a ring-tailed possum on the road near the corner to her place.

The aloneness, she thought. It is almost like a companion. A great silence and stillness, surrounding my life, running through it, echoing in the empty rooms of another empty house. Apart from Alexander, she was thinking, I have no deep relationships with men.

FOUR

Gemma waited in the foyer by the security desk at the police centre until Angie appeared in her neat dark suit and white blouse, smoothing her gleaming auburn hair, to take her through the metal detectors and upstairs. 'You look good,' Gemma replied, glancing at the polished clear skin, the thick lashes.

'I don't drink, I don't smoke, I don't eat and I don't root,' said Angie. 'I do weights and circuit training and Tai Chi. I should look good. But sometimes I ask myself what's it all for.' They were almost at the lifts. 'I've just got back from an accidental shooting,' Angie continued. 'He's cleaning the trigger and there's one up the spout.' She paused. 'He looked surprised,' she laughed, 'as you would.'

She pressed the lift button and stepped back, turning to her friend. 'Last week, we went out to a fellow's place where he'd used the shottie to take his head off. His brain was just sitting there on the bedspread beside him like a surgical prosection. Perfect. Not damaged at all. Must've just popped out sideways when his head came off.'

Gemma recalled the effects of a shotgun discharged under the chin – nothing left except a scooped-out pink neck stump. The two women stepped into the lift and Gemma put the image of the headless torso out of her mind, briefly

remembering that in the early days in the job she'd looked at people and couldn't help imagining how they'd look when they were dead, faces destroyed by beatings or head wounds, or lying on slabs at the morgue with their chins in the air. It had been a passing phase.

'I want to show you something,' she said to Angie as the lift arrived at the fifth floor. 'A video recording.'

'What's it about?' Angie asked as the two of them walked along the corridor, passing people who sometimes looked hard at Gemma as if trying to remember if she were familiar, and she felt the truth of the saying that there's nothing as 'ex' as an ex-cop.

'A man,' Gemma said. 'A loony,' and she rattled the cassette in its housing. Angie raised an eyebrow.

'How *is* your business going?' she asked Gemma.

Gemma sighed. 'Bit quiet at the moment but the insurance work keeps me going. Mandate is starting to generate some money.'

'If I ever meet someone,' said Angie, 'I'll get you straight on to him. Wish I'd done it with the last bloody mongrel bastard arsehole dickhead. How's Steve?' Gemma grunted something non-committal and the two women turned into a room filled with banks of video screens almost to the ceiling, and a library of cassettes along one wall. Angie switched on one of the monitors and took the cassette from Gemma.

'What have we got here?' she said, frowning. 'One of your surveillance tapes?' She slid the cassette into the housing and pressed Play.

'Fast forward it,' said Gemma, 'until I tell you where to stop.' Angie did so, waiting for her friend's instructions.

'Stop!' said Gemma. 'Right there.' The picture suddenly froze, the slashed crotch of the pantyhose, the knifed skirt

shimmering in freeze frame, then Gemma started the tape rolling again.

Angie stared at it, then she looked at Gemma. 'When did this happen? Where is this?' she asked.

'Night before last. At the Tusculum Hotel, Potts Point. The clothes are mine.'

'Jesus Hell,' said Angie. She watched as the close-up of the slashed pantyhose paused over the semen stain. Then she turned to her ex-colleague. 'Don't go away. Wait here. I've got something to show you.'

Angie left, then returned a few moments later with another cassette. She slid it home and switched it on. 'Authorised Police Personnel Only' Gemma read, then Angie fast-forwarded it; when the tape stopped, Gemma's eyes widened. There, on another carpet, on another floor, with different clothes, was the same thing. Another skirt and underwear slashed, other shoes laid out either side of the sheer nylon feet, another pretty blouse ripped apart with knife cuts, talcum powder sprinkled at the opening of the sleeves and over the crutch.

'It's the same thing!' said Gemma. 'What happened to me.'

'No. It's not the same thing,' said Angie. 'It's much worse.'

Gemma felt a chill of horror as she watched the police video pull slowly away from the clothes and start its slow, methodical recording. She gasped in horror as the picture panned over the carpet towards an open doorway where the splayed bare legs of a woman, knees and nightie covered with blood, came into view. The inexorable slow pan continued. The woman's lower body, bloody fabric stuck to her belly, the terrible, gaping wounds in the upper chest and throat, revealing the complex muscles and tendons, hacked and

exposed. Gemma stared. The woman's face was turned away from the horror of her death, but her long glossy hair fanned out behind her, partly covering her upper arms. Near one of her open hands, graceful as a ballerina's, was a golf club.

'Oh Jesus,' said Gemma, one hand almost covering her mouth. 'Looks like she heard him while he was doing his gig. She arms herself with the golf club and creeps out to see what's going on. She disturbs him. He attacks her with the knife he's using to cut up her clothes.' She leaned against the wall, knowing that everything pointed to the fact that the person who did this had been only metres away from her sleeping figure in a motel room less than forty-eight hours ago.

'That's how we read it, too. Are you all right?' her friend asked. 'You've gone very white.'

Gemma nodded. 'Now,' said Angie, 'you'd better tell me all about your incident.'

She stepped forward and turned the video player off, gathered up the cassettes, then automatically started running off a copy of Gemma's video. They both went back to the kitchen area of the Homicide unit. As they passed, a few people looked up from desks then returned to their work. Angie made two coffees just like the old days, using too much instant coffee.

'Who's the woman? Where was that?' Gemma asked, as the jug boiled.

'You tell me your story. Then I'll tell you mine.'

Gemma did, as Angie made coffee. She told Angie about the DNA result on the man she'd spent the night with. Angie heard her out, passed her a cup of coffee and sat down at the large white table, taking it in.

'Potts Point,' said Angie, 'where your hotel is, isn't very far away from what happened last night,' she said, touching

the crime scene video. 'Maroubra. A twenty-four-year-old accounts clerk. Single, living alone in a ground floor unit. But it was a hot night last night and she left a window partly open.' Angie paused. 'How anyone can lie down at night with a window open, let alone go to sleep, I just don't follow. Don't people realise it's a highway out there? They should go out on the perv patrol one night and see what it's like.'

'Maybe accounts clerks think differently,' said Gemma. 'Did anyone else hear anything? See anything?'

'A shift worker in the top unit said he heard screams at about two in the morning but he thought it was someone's television. Do you have any idea what time it was when your visitor was there?' Gemma took a sip of the strong coffee. She stirred sugar in, needing something sweet in her mouth after what she'd just seen.

'I was having a bath at about five-thirty in the morning when the door slammed shut. My companion left at ten to four. So I'm thinking he came in between then and when I woke up at five twelve.'

'So he's operated between about two and five. I'm waiting on the Physical Evidence people to get back to me. And Fingerprints. Will you send your clothes over to me? And I'll need to talk to the man you were with. Just in case he saw or heard anything on the way out. I'll get someone to go to the hotel, see if anyone saw or heard anything. Also check their staff. It could easily be someone who works there.'

'I'll do that,' said Gemma, handing Angie Brian Bates's card. 'It was on my list of things to do yesterday.' She took another mouthful of coffee and swallowed hard. Her throat seemed to have contracted. 'And I'll check out the brothels as well. The girls may have heard something.' She paused. 'Did you notice anything about the pattern of the attack?' she asked her friend.

'Yes,' said Angie. 'Where he'd stabbed was the same. Your clothes, the woman's clothes, then the woman herself.' Gemma shuddered again. Once, in an attack, she'd had to deal with a knife-wielding offender and it had been the most terrifying incident in her police career. She remembered the police trainer telling them in a session that a person who knows how to use a knife is faster and more dangerous than a person with a gun. 'By the time you've drawn your weapon,' he had told them, 'you're already dead.'

'You're still white as a ghost,' Angie said. She disappeared and Gemma sat down again. She was just starting to comprehend fully how very near the horror had come. That's what you do, Kit had said. You leave cracks and the hell beings slip in.

Angie returned with Gemma's video. 'Do you want to leave the original here?' Angie asked. But Gemma shook her head.

As they made their way back to the lifts, a good-looking woman in a cream suit and pearl earrings, dark blonde hair upswept in a french roll and flanked by two high-ranking officers, walked past. The woman nodded at Angie and continued along the hall, back towards the Physical Evidence section.

'Who's Sharon Stone?' Gemma asked.

'Dr Zelda someone or other,' said Angie. 'Visiting American expert. She's been doing the rounds for the last few days. She's done nothing but examine the nature and action of blood and bloodstains for the last twenty years. She's the best in the world. On a lecture circuit.'

Gemma suddenly deserted her friend and raced after the vanishing cream suit, catching her just as the trio were about to make their entrance into the secured office area.

'Excuse me!' Gemma called. The woman turned to Gemma.

'Sorry to interrupt,' said Gemma. 'I only just heard about you. I wonder if I can have your card.'

The woman frowned. She had pale, intelligent eyes behind glamorous red-framed spectacles and full lips.

'Oh, I'm sorry,' said Gemma. 'Gemma Lincoln. I used to work here five years ago.' She extended her hand and the American shook it.

'You said "used to",' she drawled. 'What about now?'

'I have my own business,' Gemma said. 'Mercator Business Services.' She pulled out a business card. 'I would very much like to have a contact number for you.'

'You do a lot of bloodstain work?' The American looked up from the business card, incredulous. Gemma shook her head.

'But you never know,' she said. 'I like to keep my list of experts up to date.'

The woman pulled a flat wallet out of her briefcase and found a card. 'Here,' she said. 'That's my address back home and my email. But I'll be here for another two weeks. Visiting other states and Canberra. I'll be collecting messages on this number.' She scrawled a number on the back of the card and passed it to Gemma.

Gemma saw that her surname was 'Firestone'. On one of her fingers, large diamonds winked and Gemma noted the red ink favoured by the expert. 'Thanks,' she said, and the American smiled then walked back to rejoin her companions, now chatting in a group with some of the Physical Evidence staff.

A few minutes later, Angie walked down with her to the foyer. 'What was all that about?' she asked Gemma.

Gemma shrugged. 'Private business,' she smiled, tucking the card into her own wallet. Just before the double doors

to Goulburn Street, Gemma turned to her friend, no longer smiling. 'Angie,' she said, 'what if he knows who I am? He might have gone through my things.'

Angie patted her on the arm. 'Let's hope the Physical Evidence people can give us something useful,' she said. 'Did Lance do the DNA analysis?' Gemma nodded. 'Then he can give the Institute a sample to match. Although there's no doubt in my mind it'll turn out to be the same offender.' The doors opened automatically and Gemma left, waving goodbye.

'I'll be in touch,' Angie called after her.

Late afternoon sun slanted through the plane trees as Gemma went back to her vehicle and drove to Potts Point and the Tusculum Hotel. She showed her ID to a bored woman at Reception. No, she was told. She'd have to come back at night if she wanted to know about the night staff. She herself only worked office hours and she'd heard nothing. Gemma left and crossed the road to the front courtyard of number 34. She rang the bell on the wrought-iron gate. A small fountain played in the tiny garden, splashing into a miniature pond. From the dark interior, an elegant woman in her fifties appeared. 'Can I help you?' she asked, her voice slightly forced, like a bad actor's.

'I was hoping Shelly might be here,' said Gemma. 'I'm a friend. Gemma Lincoln.' The woman unlocked the wrought-iron grille door and stepped back to let Gemma inside, then relocked it behind them. 'I'll see. She may be with a client.'

'There's no hurry,' said Gemma.

The woman raised an eyebrow and smiled. 'Take a seat,' she said. She disappeared up a narrow flight of stairs and Gemma looked around the bar and lounge area. The

large front room was comfortably furnished with leather lounges and occasional tables, vases of flowers, ashtrays and magazines. A bad painting of a nude woman hung on the far wall.

Gemma turned as Shelly, wrapping a shortie black satin robe and tying it with a gold rope, hurried down the stairs and came over to kiss her.

'Want to earn some extra money for Christmas?' Shelly teased.

Gemma laughed. 'Not right now, Shelly.'

Shelly twisted her tawny hair up into a knot and clipped it in a tortoiseshell comb, lit a cigarette then sat back on one of the leather armchairs with her legs stretched out on a smokey glass table. Her scuffed gold sandals and the brilliant, chipped nail polish on her toes reflected in the tabletop. She cocked her head inquiringly towards Gemma.

'I was wondering if you'd heard anything about a weirdo,' Gemma asked. 'A man who does things with women's clothes.' Shelly inhaled deeply and blew smoke out of her nostrils in two jets like a small dragon.

'Take your pick,' she said. 'Most of them are weirdos. What sort of things?'

Gemma told her about the incident at the Tusculum Hotel and the Maroubra murder. Shelly stood up, agitated. 'You'd be better off asking around the street girls. We get a nicer type of client here.' Her voice dripped with irony. 'But I'll certainly keep my ears open. I'll ask Jasmine too. She's working the streets now. She got busted for using and Lorraine threw her out.' Shelly examined a spot on her chin in the mirror opposite the nude painting, and pushed some wayward hair behind her ear. She suddenly looked very young.

'How's your daughter?' Gemma asked.

'High school next year. I'm getting to the stage where I'll have to give the game away. I tell her and the family that I'm in Public Relations, which in fact I am, but she's a smart cookie, that one.'

'What will you do?' Gemma asked.

'Not sure yet,' she said. 'I've put some money away. My stepfather said he'd help me get something.' Shelly squashed the cigarette out. 'It's the least he can do. He's been screwing me for years.'

The doorbell chimed. 'That'll be my next job,' said Shelly. 'I'd better run. Let him in for me, will you? Let's have a coffee soon.' And she ran up the stairs, leaving Gemma to open the gate. The middle-aged man looked her up and down, then smiled. Gemma pushed past him and out the gate, hurrying through the courtyard.

Silverwater Road seemed unnaturally busy and the sky above was a glaring white, hot and humid, the air stinking with diesel fumes. It felt more like a February day than October. Gemma made the turn towards the prison and then swung off the road up to the boom gate and the gatekeepers. She told them who she was and who she'd come to see. They checked their visitors' lists and indicated where she might park.

After parking the car, Gemma walked towards the entrance. Inmates in their dark green overalls eyed her. Although the cyclone wire fences surrounded block-style buildings that could have been a modern high school or university complex, the razor wire hooped around the barriers at the top of the fence reminded people where they really were. As she walked towards the office area, she was met by a middle-aged man wearing a Corrective Services uniform. He recognised her from previous visits and accompanied her down to the recreation room.

'He's waiting for you,' said the officer. Gemma walked quickly down the linoleum corridor, where a couple of the inmates laboured over a mop and bucket. They stepped back to allow her to pass and she walked into the large recreation room, where tables and chairs stood around and vending machines offered chips and instant cappuccino. Gemma passed a man making a phone call from a coin-operated telephone on the wall, and another inmate looked up at her as she made her way towards the other side of the room.

Gemma saw an old, frail man waiting for someone, sitting alone at a far window, looking out. She realised he was looking out for her, but she'd parked behind the building this time so he hadn't seen her. This was her third visit. She paused a second, looking at him. He seemed immensely alone and sadness welled up from deep inside of her. She collected herself, then went over to him. His face lit up when he saw her and he rose quickly from the chair. They hadn't got to the hugging stage yet, but Gemma longed to say something from a heart that was overflowing with love, awkwardness and confusion.

'Hullo, Dad,' she finally said, putting her hand out to pat his arm. Then she squeezed her lips together to stop herself from crying.

FIVE

The following afternoon, Gemma decided it was time to take her body in hand. Finishing work early, she changed into shorts, sports bra and joggers, grabbed her gym bag with its towel and toiletries, and took a jacket.

The Seals Club at Maroubra had a gym that would never attract the lycra set, thought Gemma, and a good thing too. Right on the top of an ugly 'sixties building, it commanded stunning views of the wild and wilful beach that never made it in the fashion stakes, despite Little Patti stomping at Maroubra. The rifle range and the headland covered in low coastal scrub met the pale blue of the sky, and Gemma stood there a moment, watching the gulls riding the wind. It was always windy there and Gemma shivered, thinking of a window left open during the night in a street not far away. She walked into the club, paid her two dollars and went up in the lift, crossing the dance floor where sometimes she would have to navigate around elderly couples, the women wearing elegant, gold-strapped high-heeled sandals, and dancing to old-time music.

Gradually the rhythmic effort of pedalling the exercise bike calmed her. The visit to Silverwater had taken precedence, for the moment, over her fear. She went over the conversation she'd had with her father, the two of them

looking out the window of the large, untidy recreation room to where a few inmates kicked a ball around in a caged-in area.

'I've already been out working on day release for some months now,' he told her. 'It's not as if I don't know what the world's like any more.'

Part of her had longed to tell him about the awful incident of the night before last, but she couldn't tell him that. He was still too much a stranger. In the next few days, she'd look around the real estate places for something for her father.

Yet as she pedalled, images from Angie's horrible crime scene video haunted her imagination. She deliberately looked around the gym to block them. It was her policy to maintain 'safe houses' – places that were hers alone, where she never went with a man, and the Seals Club was one of them. Occasionally, men tried to pick her up as she sat in one of the lounges with a cool drink after a workout, but she had a number of friendly rejoinders sufficient to deal with any contingency. She would never take a man home from here because she would never drink alcohol here. This was strictly her space: safe and sexless.

She pedalled harder and noticed that the weightlifter at the eastern end had been joined by a second man, a younger fellow, who was leaning against the chest high windowsill and staring out to sea. When he suddenly turned and saw her staring at him, she felt caught out and looked away hastily, concentrating on her legs. The bike was now simulating a hill climb and the demands on calf and quad muscles claimed her full attention. Sweat itched her brow and armpits. Gradually, the electronic terrain levelled out and Gemma went faster, according to the speedo of the stationary bike. It wasn't long before she felt calmer. My house is secure, she thought. I'm not going to let some

homicidal maniac take up rent-free space in my head. She pedalled harder.

After the bike, she did the trolley weights, lifting twenty to thirty kilos depending on the work. Bench presses, the rowing machine and finally, the stepper. Up and down she went, until her legs ached and demanded a rest. Finally, she stepped down, shaky and spent. She went into the women's change rooms, had a quick shower and slipped on her swimming costume. She went to the pool, pulled on her cap and tested the tepid water with a toe. She pulled her goggles on and stood a moment. As she hit the water, she encountered the eyes of the younger man through her misty goggles. He was pedalling the same bike she'd been on, with a ringside seat of the pool.

No way, sport, Gemma said to herself as she swooshed to the surface, slicing the water with her arms, moving steadily towards the other end of the pool. She did two laps and rested, then another four, hauled herself up and out of the water, wrapped the towel around herself, and took her gym bag back into the change room. Out of the corner of her eye, she noticed the younger man swing upright from the bench press machine. She couldn't tell if he was watching.

She had another shower and, wrapping the towel round her, stepped into the sauna room. Stretched out along the top bench in the hot darkness, Gemma felt the water drying from her body and the surfaces of her eyes. She closed them. But the slashed body and clothes of the woman in the crime scene video kept erupting in her mind. She sat up, swearing. She couldn't relax.

Half an hour later she was dressed again and walking against a stiff southerly towards her car. It was still light at ten past six, and the aquamarine waves and pale sand were touched with apricot and mauve shadows. She threw

her gym bag in the back, climbed into the car and started it, noticing another car doing the same some distance behind her. Gemma glanced over. It was the younger man from the gym, she was sure, driving a dark green Ford. He's keen, she thought angrily, as she revved up Marine Parade. She noticed him settle a distance behind her, and her heart froze. Broome Street was just behind her. The image of the woman from the crime scene video flashed into her mind again. *It's him,* she thought. *He went through my bag. He saw my ID. He knows who I am.*

Fear surged from her heart into her arms as she swung the wheel hard left into Torrington. The fear doubled as she saw him do the same in the mirror. Calm down, she instructed herself. You're being paranoid. He's just a pest playing games. It's not the killer because if he already knows who I am, there's no need to follow me. She signalled right and drove onto the roundabout and then, instead of taking the right-handed turn into Arden Street, she kept turning, making a complete circle back to Malabar Road. In the rear view mirror, she had the pleasure of seeing the green Ford forced to move into Arden Street with another car hard on his back bumper. Gemma memorised his registration before he vanished, shouted aloud in triumph and headed for home.

Gemma realised she was still holding her gym bag in a clenched fist. She put it down. The horror was closer now. She took a deep breath and went to the lounge room, needing a drink. She made herself a Scotch and went back to her office. Angie answered and Gemma took a deep breath. 'Some idiot tried to follow me from the gym. I need a rego check. QGT 178, late model Ford sedan.'

For the sake of the logging tapes at her place of work, Angie's voice switched to professional mode. 'I'm sorry,

madam, we can't give you any information about vehicle registration. I suggest you take your query to the Roads and Transport Authority.' Gemma knew that Angie treated every phone as 'off' but nevertheless would have written the registration number down by now.

'Usual place, usual time tomorrow?' Gemma asked.

Angie agreed. 'By the way,' she added, 'Lance got a perfect match from the murder scene with the semen deposited on your clothes.' Gemma couldn't speak for a moment. Although it wasn't really a surprise there was a terrible finality.

Gemma pulled up outside the West Lindfield Uniting Church as people started pouring out of the doors and onto the grassed area around the church. Spinner had told her Imelda Moresby was to speak there tonight. She glanced at her watch. It was nearly half past ten. She got out of the car and had to move against the traffic.

'You're a bit late, luv,' said a woman wearing an orange and black printed blouse. 'Show's over.'

'I want to see Imelda Moresby,' said Gemma. 'Do you know where she is?' The two of them stood in front of the entry as people flowed around them.

'She was just back there, talking to some people from the country.' The woman indicated the far corner of the room.

'What does she look like? What's she wearing?' asked Gemma.

'You can't miss Imelda,' said the woman, smiling. 'Anyway, she'll probably know you.'

Gemma thanked her and battled her way in. She hadn't been in a church since she left boarding school, she realised, and she looked around, wondering why places dedicated to worship seem always to be so heavy and ugly. In the corner

indicated by the orange and black bloused woman stood four people. They had their arms lightly linked around each other, as if they might all suddenly break into the steps of a folk dance. Gemma was about to approach them but something extraordinary started to happen. The four people raised their heads from what had seemed like fervent conversation, lifted their hands in the air and several fine, high notes issued from them. An electric thrill ran through Gemma's body. An eerie yet beautiful and wordless chord was sustained by the singers, a sound resembling Tibetan singing bowls of subtle pitch, tones and harmonics layering the air. Gemma stopped where she was. Her hair was standing on end and a thrill of heat rushed through her body. Her eyes filled as if she wanted to cry. No one else seemed to be taking any notice of the extraordinary sound, which had reached an ethereal pitch. High, pristine voices sang, using strange words and phrases, the men's voices of the quartet forming a base of chords and harmonies as the soprano voices floated and spiralled. It reached a climax, hovered there for a few seconds, then softly fell away. Gemma stared at the group of people who had created such unearthly music.

'Are you looking for me?' One of the women turned around and Gemma saw the regular features, familiar even after thirty years, oval face and soft dark hair.

'Mrs Moresby ...' she started to say. But Mrs Moresby broke away from the group and beckoned her to follow. Gemma did so, pursuing the woman down a corridor until they came to a small office. Mrs Moresby opened the door and ushered Gemma in. 'That singing,' Gemma said. 'I've never heard anything like it.'

Mrs Moresby smiled. 'We call it tongues,' she said. 'It's a way of praying.' Her fine eyes were tired but they gleamed with intelligence. She picked up a light jacket

that lay on the back of a chair, pulling it on while she spoke.

'It's Gemma Chisholm, isn't it,' she said, but it wasn't a question.

'It is,' said Gemma. 'But I don't use that surname. I use my mother's maiden name – Lincoln.'

Mrs Moresby nodded. 'I think of you often, you and your sister. Does that surprise you?'

'It does,' Gemma admitted.

'I have never forgotten that night. Or that sound I heard at the back of your house well before your father arrived home.'

'That's what I want to talk about.'

'I know,' said Mrs Moresby and she laughed. 'You don't have to be clairvoyant to know that!'

'Are you clairvoyant?' Gemma couldn't help asking.

Mrs Moresby sighed. 'There is a place in mind,' she said, speaking the words as if she'd said them a thousand times, 'that is beyond space and time. Every mind shares in it. Every mind has access to it. It's something like the dream world. Very few people practise getting there. Now, you're not here to discuss clairvoyance.'

'I've got a newspaper clipping,' said Gemma. 'You mentioned hearing a noise that night about half an hour before my father's return to the house,' Gemma continued. 'The prosecution lawyer suggested it might have been a possum.'

'Might have been a possum. Might have been anything. I had to agree with him. I didn't actually *see* anything.'

'Could you see the french doors from your house?' Gemma asked.

'Partly,' the other woman answered. 'There was a patio—'

'Yes. I remember.' The old memory came up like a misty

vision in Gemma's mind. 'With a stone flagging and huge flower tubs. And a trellis.'

'It was the trellis that was in the way. I think it had a passion-fruit vine over it. Very dense in parts. Two tubs – I wouldn't call them huge, but you were only a little child then – with citrus trees in them. Cumquats? Bergamot? Two large containers, at any rate.' Mrs Moresby closed her eyes. 'Everything goes in twos in this.'

'What do you mean?' Gemma asked.

'Two citrus tubs. Two sisters. Two mistresses. Two killers.'

'*Two* mistresses? Two killers?'

'I get a very strong sense of two killers whenever I think of Mrs Chisholm's death. But that was a long time ago.'

'Mistresses?'

Mrs Moresby shrugged. 'As I said, it's a long time ago. It's you and your sister I'm concerned about. There is a double death around us.' Mrs Moresby opened the door of the office and walked out, switching off the light. Gemma followed her. The phrase 'double death' almost made Gemma giggle. It sounded like something an ice-cream company might market, excruciatingly sweet and rich. In the long hall, shadows loomed and the recessed doorways were pools of darkness. She followed Mrs Moresby back along the corridor and into the body of the hall. Only a few people stood around, talking. The chairs had been replaced in piles against the walls, and all except one of the exits was locked. They went out of it onto the grassy area, where two thin cypress trees pointed to a waning moon. Gemma looked around the dark shrubbery of the grounds of the church, suddenly spooked.

'What is it?' she asked Mrs Moresby. 'Why are you concerned about me and my sister?'

'Because we are karmically bound, your family and me.' Mrs Moresby unlocked the door of her car, then straightened up and looked at Gemma. 'Information comes to me in images and sensations. Sometimes, it's just a powerful feeling. All I can do is pass on things that seem to be important. Then I've done my part. It's not important to me whether people believe me or not. Sometimes the information is inconclusive. Because it comes from a place beyond time, it's not clear to me whether it's about the past, the present or the future. I'm not a perfect receiver so I don't always know the difference. But there is a lot of energy about *two*.' Mrs Moresby opened the door. 'Evil is stirring,' she said. 'Pray,' she commanded over the top of the little car. 'You must pray.'

Great, Gemma thought. That's all I need. Evil is always stirring, lady, she wanted to say as the car started up. And people have been praying since forever. She stood and watched the car drive away. In her imagination, two shrouded figures now crept between the tubs of citrus trees and soundlessly jemmied open the french doors. She shivered and hurried to her car.

When she finally went to sleep that night, it was to dream fitfully about her father and the green Ford and two killers who were watching her house.

SIX

'Please come in, Clive,' Kit said, in a pleasant, neutral voice, standing back to allow him to walk ahead of her down the hallway to the consulting room on the left. While waiting for him, she had opened windows and patted up the cushions and pillows, focusing her mind on her client. Because she worked somatically there was no desk and chair in this office, which troubled many of her clients at the beginning of their work with her. They were used to being safely on the other side of their therapist's desk, or at least sitting in familiar chairs. Kit's therapeutic approach, based in bioenergetic analysis, was directed at helping her clients regain the sense of their bodily selves and, eventually, the bliss of being. But at first they sat on the floor with her, with greater or lesser degrees of comfort, depending on their bodily distortions.

Clive Mindell's wife had left him after twenty-seven years because they'd 'grown apart' as he termed it. To his shock, he'd found himself impotent with his new girlfriend. He'd tried Viagra, but had developed severe headaches. 'I don't like the idea of sticking needles in my cock' he'd told her on his last visit and Kit could only agree. He'd heard that somatic work – 'whatever that means' – could help him to 'perform'. Kit had listened attentively, noting his language.

As he walked, his physical and emotional contradictions seemed even clearer to Kit than they'd been the week before. It was often the case that once she'd discussed her work with Alexander, she found more levels of awareness, more clarity. Watch the look before the cringe, she reminded herself. Clive walked straight into her room and looked around.

'This place is hard to find. That's why I'm late. Still no chairs I see?' he said in his barking voice.

'Still no chairs,' she agreed. She sat down on the floor so as to allow him to dominate the space and watched him. From this angle, she could observe Clive's structure: the puffed-up upper body and neck, all the energy pushing upwards towards the head, neck and chest; his face, too, had a bloated look, as if there was too much pressure pumped up there. In fact, his whole cranium looked distended. She took note again of the small pelvis and underdeveloped thighs and legs, the lack of power and energy in the lower body. Just for a second, she was reminded of a Toby Jug puppet, all huge body and trailing, fabric legs.

Clive was very uneasy, looking around, trying to seem unconcerned. 'Oh well,' he said, 'here goes.' He got down clumsily on legs that seemed disconnected from the rest of him. Kit sat nearby, waiting for him to start.

'My girlfriend has called it off with me,' he suddenly said. 'Because I came here. So impotence doesn't matter now, does it.' Suddenly it was there again, the cringe, but she was too late, she'd missed the moment just before it.

Kit smiled. 'I don't know,' she said. 'Does it?'

There was a silence. 'What will you do?' Kit finally asked.

Clive shrugged. 'Not sure. Probably focus more on my work. I might take up flying again.'

Kit was beginning to get the story of his childhood. Over

the months, she would get the rest, the suffering, the grief that had gone to make up this difficult man; the way he had learned to defend himself from the earliest times, creating this puffed-up structure to hide his vulnerability from the world. Clive leaned closer to her, uncomfortable at their mutual eye levels. 'I want you to get stuck into me,' he said. 'Start the body work. I'm really ready for it.' There was something like a leer behind his eyes, Kit thought.

'When your body energy tells me it's ready for that, I will,' she said. 'But not until then.'

'But I'm telling you,' he said. 'You can start now.'

Kit smiled and gently shook her head. 'I can sense a lot of resistance in your body,' she said.

He looked bewildered. 'What do you mean, resistance?'

Kit looked squarely at him. It was not her practice to discuss too much with people who'd lived in their heads all their lives; people who could talk all day about feelings without ever experiencing any. 'I connect with you at an energy level and I know you are telling me to keep away. I'm respecting that.'

'What energy? What are you talking about?'

'Your energy. The part of you that makes you go.' She smiled again. A child would understand exactly what she meant, she thought, visualising children so filled with fizzing energy that they had to run and yell and spin around for the sheer joy of it. She saw Clive's bafflement and decided to tell him something of herself. 'My body was once very tight and narrow,' she said, and she could see him looking at her and frowning. 'I used to get terrible headaches, as well.'

'What happened,' asked Clive, who had been listening intently, 'that made things different?'

'I started doing the sort of therapy that I now offer you,' she said.

'It's all a bit vague though, isn't it?' he said. 'This energy business.'

'If you don't eat and drink you have no energy and you die,' said Kit matter-of-factly. 'The nutrients move around in the blood. That's energy. There's nothing magic or mystical about it.'

Clive looked past her out the window. He seemed to be deep in thought. 'A woman was murdered at Maroubra,' he suddenly said after a short pause and without looking at her. 'Did you hear about it?'

Kit looked at him closely. 'I wonder why you mention her now,' she said, because the remark seemed almost like a warning.

Clive turned to look at her. 'I was looking out the window,' he said, 'and I read where she'd left the window open a little bit. Your opened window reminded me.'

Kit considered the plausible connection. 'Are you wondering,' she asked him, 'whether if you open up a little bit of your "window" – start to feel a little bit – I might come in and kill you?'

Clive stared at her and there was a long silence. 'When my wife left me,' he said finally, still avoiding her eyes, 'she took her Burmese cat with her. Shortly after that, I saw a similar cat lying on the lawn of a house where I was parking the car. I got a sort of pain in my chest.' There was an even longer silence and Clive became increasingly uneasy. 'I don't know what to say,' he finally said. 'Some of the things you've said don't make sense to me. But some of it – I don't know – seems to be quite sensible.'

Kit picked up an exercise book and a pencil. 'I'd like you to tell me what you expect from this work you're paying for. What relationships create difficulties for you. What areas you would like to see improved in your life.' As she waited

for him to speak, she noticed the gathering energy in his brows and eyes, the movement in his face that accompanied his barking laugh.

'I would like to kill my mother,' he said. 'That would improve our relationship out of sight.' But he cringed away from her as he spoke, as if he believed she might strike him. When she didn't react, Clive continued.

'What I'd really like is a woman who didn't speak or move. Just someone who would lie there.' He looked away as he spoke the next words. 'Then I'd be able to get hard. I'd like to undress her, piece by piece, taking off her blouse and skirt, then her stockings and shoes, and then her panties and bra. Nice and neat, in order. Then I'd like to just lie there with her, neither of us saying a word or touching. Just thinking about this is making me hard.' He looked at her, wondering if he'd gone too far, wondering if this degree of honesty was permissible. It appeared that it was and he relaxed as he noticed Kit's unruffled demeanour.

Kit checked her watch and nodded. 'Sex is safe in the mind,' she said to him. 'It's very easy to get aroused by our own images.'

'Real women are dangerous,' said Clive. 'It's much safer and easier to have sex by yourself.'

Kit looked at him in wonder. It never failed to amaze her, the speed with which some clients started to see their fear and its defences. Clive was moving fast.

'Some women *are* deadly,' she agreed. 'Some women do kill their men. They kill them emotionally with their negativity and criticism. Their chronic hostility. Sometimes they kill them in reality, too.'

'And sometimes men kill women,' he grinned. 'I don't know what the statistics would be, but lots more men kill

women than the other way round.' He seemed extremely pleased with the fact.

'Oh yes,' said Kit. 'Lots more.' It took all her professionalism to keep a light and neutral voice, to keep her father out of the therapy room. One day, said a small voice in her mind, you are going to have to deal with him. And the sooner the better. Clive slyly looked at her face, to see how she might take what he was going to say. 'I could go to a prostitute,' he said. 'Get her to do what I want. All I'd have to do is give her money and she'd lie there still as a corpse. She would have to do what I told her because I'd pay for it.'

'You could do that,' said Kit. 'Like you say, all it would take is money.'

Clive looked around the room and saw the photograph of Will on the mantelpiece. 'Who's that?' he asked.

'My son,' she said.

Clive looked at her and then back at the photograph again, comparing them. 'He looks like you,' he said. Then he seemed to be deep in thought. 'That woman who was killed at Maroubra,' he continued and for a second Kit didn't understand to whom he was referring, 'she looked a bit like you, I thought.' Kit nodded non-committally, noting how he'd moved from his mother, to someone looking like her, to a murdered woman, and wondering whether this was just transference hostility or something more. 'The newspaper said the killer had done something with her clothes. I wonder what that means.' He was watching her closely and Kit felt uneasy.

The session finished shortly afterwards, and she walked with him to the front door to say goodbye. As he turned away from her, he missed his balance on the step from the hall to the verandah.

'Be careful as you go,' Kit told him. 'Sometimes, even

talking about these things stirs up body energies and you might become a little unbalanced.' He looked at her closely and she couldn't read his expression at all. As she closed the door behind him prior to writing up her notes on the session, she realised she had still failed to notice the movement before the cringe.

SEVEN

Gemma couldn't get Imelda Moresby out of her mind. Although, in the clear light of day in the comfort and security of her pale blue office, the woman's words of the night before seemed contrived and portentous. But they kept coming back. She looked up the number of the church at Lindfield and left her phone number and a message asking Mrs Moresby to call her.

After several more calls and trying to do estimates on a couple of surveillance jobs, she realised that the gnawing feeling in her stomach was not only unease. She was hungry and she made herself a chicken salad. Taxi drove her crazy getting between her legs and winding around her as she carried the plate and a glass of wine out to the deck. The sea and the sky were settling into night, with only a luminous horizon line dividing the darker Pacific from the evening sky. Taxi jumped up onto the table and the wine glass would have toppled to the ground had not Gemma grabbed it. She smacked him and he yeowed, skidding away into the lounge room to sit with his back to her, involving himself with compulsive washing. 'Oh come here,' she finally called to him, but he sat resolutely lashing his tail from side to side, ignoring her. She was drinking coffee and watching the first stars

come out before she and Taxi became reconciled. She snuggled him into her neck and shoulder, listening to his astonishing purr.

She remembered she hadn't checked her mailbox and went outside into the cool night with her key. There were two envelopes, one with unfamiliar handwriting and one telephone bill. She made her way inside, locking the door securely behind her, placed the envelope on the table and opened it carefully. It contained a covering note from Philip Hawker and, under that, her father's original handwritten statement. Slowly, Gemma unfolded the page and a half of yellowing, faint-lined paper. Automatically, Gemma started to read but her breath caught in her throat, and she stood still a moment, shocked. She took the papers over to her desk, switched the reading light on and went to sit down. Aware of the pounding of her heart, she decided to pour herself a strong brandy first. Her fingers shaking, she picked up the yellowing sheets.

'Statement made by Dr Archie Chisholm, September 17th, 1967, about the events of this evening. I want to write it out now while things are fresh in my memory,' she read.

> At about two-thirty, I rang Marianne to see if she wanted to go to the dinner that night at the university. She told me she didn't want to go to the dinner, because she is being treated for depression. I said that was fine with me. We did not argue. I saw four more of my patients, went to the bank but because there was a long queue, did not get money out then. Made a brief house call to a patient. After that, I left and drove straight to the house. Marianne was in bed and the girls were in their room. I went upstairs to get ready for the dinner. There

was no food for the girls so I drove to the corner shop and got some eggs and made scrambled eggs for them. Then I got dressed to go out to the dinner and left the house at about seven-thirty. Marianne was up. I stayed at the dinner until about ten-thirty and drove to the house, arriving there at eleven o'clock. I parked my car and went inside. I went into the dining room and found Marianne lying in the corner near the french doors, which were open. She had severe head injuries and had lost a lot of blood. There was a faint, stringy pulse. I rang Emergency and waited for the ambulance to arrive. They said they would contact the police. I cradled Marianne in my arms and she coughed blood onto me. She was not conscious. Gemma came in and I told her your mother is hurt and to go next door and tell Mrs Moresby to come over. I went with Marianne in the ambulance and stayed until the surgeon came out and said my wife had died. I came home and Mrs Moresby is here staying the night with us. The police have just been and taken my clothes. I don't know anyone who would want to kill my wife and that is what I told them.

Underneath was her father's signature, long and lean, with the 'A' and the 'C' scrawled far too large. Gemma put the papers down and stood up, shaken. Then she had to sit down again, because she thought she'd fall over if she didn't. Suddenly, transported by her father's bald words, she was back there. The memory came from such a distance, it was like looking the wrong way through a telescope and the events of that night had a hectic, theatrical light around them, as if they'd taken place in a studio, where dark shadows lay beyond stark lighting in a setting that had been contrived to shock. She saw again, this time from her father's point of view, the little five-year-old in the nightie, standing on

the bottom step of the curved staircase at their old house. She thought of Mrs Moresby's peculiar words of the night before and felt tears welling up in her which she bit back harshly. She remembered going into Kit's room that night and creeping into bed with her. Then there seemed to be a long gap in her memory before the days of the boarding school and the long summer holidays at Aunt Merle's place at Darling Point, where they pretty well pleased themselves from morning to night, down by the seaweed-filled tidal pool formed by a sandstone wall enclosing a tiny part of the Harbour. Gemma switched the light out in her office and went into the bathroom, where she cleaned her teeth while her heart raced.

She checked the back door thoroughly after she'd locked herself in for the night and went around to the other doors, the deck, the entrance hall, making sure they were secured. She couldn't get Imelda Moresby's oracle out of her head – the word 'evil' seemed to have a power and an energy that ensured it remained shining darkly in her mind. Fear was building up in her. She restlessly checked every room, then switched the alarm system on and was comforted by the panel near the door with its winking lights, which could only be disarmed by the key that lay safely in her wallet. She put the video on top of the television set and poured herself a whisky and milk nightcap while she prepared for her shower. She wished she could ring Kit and talk over the Imelda Moresby perplex, but she realised she couldn't and felt unreasonably angry with her sister. Taxi followed her around, meeowing loudly, tail straight up, his funny spare tyre under his belly wobbling as he trotted, continuing after her right into the bathroom, jumping up on top of the toilet seat to sit there as she showered, washing his face and licking his jaws widely. He seemed to like the steam on his fur and tongue.

After the shower, she slipped into an old tracksuit because it was a cold night despite the warm October day and got into bed. She put the light out and lay there a while before finally going to sleep.

Something woke her with a start – she couldn't tell how much later – a familiar sound. Gemma felt the fire and ice surge of adrenalin. She lay, stiff with attention, straining her ears for the sound again. It was impossible that anyone could be in her place. No one could get in here, not past delicate sensors that detected body heat and microwaves that reacted to the movements of molecules. If an intruder had a body or made a movement, her system would pick him up and scream in warning. Perhaps Taxi had jumped up on a counter in the kitchen and knocked something onto the floor. But then she felt the heavy warm lump of him at the end of her bed. He was here with her.

She lay, frozen, thinking of the knife slashes in her clothes. Then, very slowly and without sound, she slid open the bottom drawer of the bedside table and groped around until she found what she was looking for. Her fingers closed around it, and gently she lifted the weight of the short-barrelled revolver onto the bed. Another sound and her fingers flew to find the cartridges. She grabbed two, slid into a crouch on the floor, broke the gun open, sliding the smooth weights into their cylinders. Gemma wormed her way across the floor, moving to crouch against the wall, just behind her bedroom door.

A man's tread, careful, steady, unhurried. He'd read her address from her bag that night at the motel; he'd somehow, impossibly, got into her house. She couldn't believe this was happening. He was coming towards the bedroom, she could hear the soft sound of his footfall on the parquetry. The

knife slashes in her clothes sprang to her mind, but this time, like the woman at Maroubra, she was in the clothes and the great, raking wounds were in her own flesh. She pushed the safety off the .38 and squinted through the crack in the door, momentarily catching a glimpse of the figure blocking the light from the night sea. Stringy hair hanging down; the soft clank of metal, maybe chains. She smelt body odour and fuel, the stink of the internal combustion engine. Gemma was rigid. She dared not breathe in case she sobbed in fear. In a second he'd be turning into her room. As he pushed the door to her bedroom open, she suddenly inhaled and sprang out, facing him square, the gun ahead of her in the firing position.

'Stop right there!' she screamed. 'Stop right there or I'll shoot.'

Her heart pounded in her ears. The intruder froze, backlit by the faint light from the deck.

Then he spoke. 'Jesus! Gemma! It's me.'

'Stevie?'

Gemma lowered the gun. Steve switched the light on. He was wearing the long hair, beard and dirty leathers of an outlaw bikie and his shocked eyes stared out of a face that she took a moment to recognise as Steve's.

'I didn't want to disturb you,' he said.

'I almost shot you,' she yelled over him. Now anger rushed into the vacuum left by the withdrawal of fear and shock. Gemma was shaking all over. 'You bastard, Steve. I thought you were someone else. Don't ever do that again.'

He stood there, the colour returning to his face. 'Can I move now?' he asked.

'How did you get in?'

Steve held up a key. 'Where did you get that?' she asked.

'For Chrissake. You gave it to me last year. I fed Taxi, remember? In fact you gave me two, because the first one didn't always work.'

Gemma felt the anger drain out of her. She limped back to the bed, laid the gun down and sat there, feeling desolate. She'd completely forgotten he had those keys and she couldn't tell Steve about the night before last. He stood there, unsure of what to do next. 'What time is it?' she said.

'Twenty past one. I was going to sing "Happy birthday to you".'

'It's not tomorrow, I mean today. It's not till next week.'

'Forget it. I'm sorry I frightened you. It wasn't a good idea.'

Because he was a good street cop, very sensitive to moods and currents between people, Steve immediately sensed the secret in her. 'What is it?' he asked.

Gemma shook her head. 'Nothing. I've had a long day. I'm jumpy, that's all.'

'Are you? Maybe I should go.'

Gemma went into her office, switched on the light, picked up her father's statement, and brought it out to show Steve. He read it, occasionally looking up at her, then turning his attention back to the handwritten document. He frowned. 'Funny thing to do,' he said. 'With your wife just dead.'

Gemma stared. 'I suppose,' she said. 'But he was used to writing up notes.'

Steve put the papers down. 'Like she was a case, or something?' He looked up at her. 'Anyway, obviously they didn't believe him.' He went to her but she didn't want him to touch her; anger, confusion and relief all combined to make her just want to be still and quiet for a while. I need space, she thought.

'Where did you get this from?' he asked, indicating the written statement.

'Retired cop. Philip Hawker. It was his biggest case, I get the feeling.'

'I've heard of him,' said Steve. 'One of the old dinosaurs.'

'Come and I'll make you a cup of tea,' she said in an effort to redeem the situation as she turned away from him. 'Don't go. I'll be okay in a moment.' She put her arm around him and they walked into the kitchen together. Taxi walked in, and Steve made a half-hearted hiss at him. Taxi took no notice and went to his dish, licking at the last morsel of fish dinner.

'I want a second opinion.'

'What do you mean?' Steve asked.

She turned from putting the kettle on, her eyes alive. 'There's a bloodstain expert in town. Dr Zelda Fireball or something. I'm chasing up the original police brief. I'm going to get her to look at the photographs.'

Steve looked interested. 'It's a good idea,' he said. 'There's been a lot of new stuff around physical evidence in the last little while.' He paused. 'And it'll put your mind at rest.'

'One way or the other,' she said.

'That's what I meant,' Steve said quickly.

'What happened to your case?' she asked him as they had coffee and bread and honey. It was too cold to sit out on the deck and the nor'easter buffeted the sliding doors as they sat at the dining table.

'I had to get out early,' he told her. 'One of them was very suspicious of me. I got the feeling he might have been in the job once.'

'A cop?'

Steve shrugged. 'Maybe not police. Maybe military. Maybe

what you do. He had some fancy equipment. Anyway, I got a stack of evidence on them. They were making amphetamines in an old farmhouse. The drug squad busted them this morning. Seven arrests including me until I managed to get someone to contact the boss. So I came straight here. I've been riding for hours. Wanted to see you. Give you this.'

He passed a little package to her, and Gemma smiled with pleasure. Her pulse rate had dropped and was almost normal again. 'I'm not going to open it now,' she said, putting it on the dining room table next to the heavy silver vase. 'I'll wait till the proper day. God, you look shocking.'

'I've been riding with the Outlaw Raiders of the Southern Cross,' he replied, sounding hurt. 'I'm *supposed* to look shocking.'

She looked at him, his craggy face, older than it should have been at thirty-nine, the deep furrows from nose to mouth. But his lips hadn't hardened into narrow lines like so many men's, she thought. 'What a birthday surprise!' she suddenly laughed out loud. And he joined in, eyes crinkling, head thrown back. 'Me in a body bag. You up on a manslaughter charge.' Gemma laughed till tears ran down her face, and she couldn't breathe. 'Oh,' she said, when she finally regained her breath, 'you've gotta laugh.' She lifted a piece of bread and honey to her mouth but put it down again, suddenly having no appetite.

'The jury sure didn't believe him. He was sentenced to fifteen years.'

Steve stared at her. 'You've never talked about your father before,' he said. 'What's changed?'

She picked up the piece of bread again. 'I've been visiting him,' she said. 'He's been on work release for a year, clerking for a solicitor he met in gaol. He's coming out soon.'

'Has he been inside all the time? I thought you said fifteen years.'

'He was involved in an escape attempt a number of years ago and a warden was almost killed. He got another fifteen for that. He told me it was a terrible mistake.'

Steve went into the kitchen and found himself a beer. He came back to the table, wrenched the top off and sat down again. 'So what's he like?'

Gemma shrugged. 'He's – he's like a nice old man. He's gentle, he's – I don't know. I look at him and I just know he didn't do it. He couldn't have.'

'What was his story?'

She flashed at him. 'Not a *story*,' she said. 'Like he says in his statement. He came home and found her like that. *Already* dying. Someone had come in through the french doors to the dining room. He held her in his arms until the ambulance came. Of course he got blood all over him. The police case was based on bloodstain evidence on the walls and on his jacket. They alleged that the splash patterns were consistent with him lifting the hammer up and down once she – my mother – was on the floor. They had some bloodstain expert re-enacting it in court with the hammer.'

'How do you know all this?' Steve wanted to know. 'You must have been only a little kid.'

'He's told me all about it.' She paused. 'It happened on my fifth birthday.' Suddenly she burst into tears. 'I'm sorry,' she said. 'I'm sorry.' She blew her nose hastily and tried to smile at him. He was half out of his chair, unsure of what to do after her earlier rebuff. 'You know, it sounds really silly, but I'd been promised this white cat from the toy shop. It had batteries and it actually walked along, squeaking. No one even remembered it was my birthday.'

Steve picked up the statement from where it lay on the

table between them. 'You should get a Scan expert to look at this,' he said. 'One of my mates has done the Advanced Scan course – Scientific Content Analysis. I'm sure he'd be happy to do an analysis of the statement. Without even knowing it, people betray themselves in their written and spoken words.'

'What sort of thing could he find?' said Gemma, feeling a little alarmed.

'Lies come from the imagination,' Steve continued, 'and the truth comes from memory, two different parts of the brain. That makes differences in the way people write. The differences show up to someone who's trained to spot them. Or people just leave bits out of their accounts. But even censoring something leaves a trace in the language. Of course, you've got to know what to look for. He does, and he owes me a few.'

'But the statement's thirty years old.'

'Doesn't matter. It's not like physical evidence,' he explained. 'A Scan expert only looks at the *language*. It's amazing what they can find.'

There was a silence. Then Gemma went into her office and photocopied the statement. 'Here,' she said, giving it to him. 'See what your mate can do.'

Steve glanced at the paper briefly, folded it neatly and pocketed it.

'Why don't you come to bed and warm up with me?' Gemma asked, feeling awkward.

'I'll grab a shower,' he said.

'I don't know,' she said. 'I might like the role play. I've never done it with a Hell's Angel.'

But he went to the bathroom and she waited for him in bed. When he came in she pounced on him, still very keyed up. He held her for a long time before doing anything and

she felt how good it was, just to hold her man close and smell him, and feel the male softness of his skin, this tenderness so different from the wild sex with Brian Bates and the others like him, the biting, heaving and grabbing. Steve took a long time, touching, stroking, allowing for the months of separation and the intermittent phone calls, getting to know her all over again, and she did the same. By the time he smoothed himself inside her, she was melting towards him. 'Stevie, oh Stevie,' was all she could say. Just his name until her voice became incoherent as they rocked together.

Later, half tangled up with him, she drifted off, wondering hazily why she did the sort of things she did with strangers when things were so good with Steve. She tightened her hold on the warm body next to her as she felt him move. She barely heard him whisper.

'I can't sleep. I'll go and watch TV for a while.' Gemma was just aware of him sliding out of bed as she drifted into sleep.

It seemed only seconds later when she woke in alarm to his angry voice. He'd switched the bedside light on and was standing beside her. 'What's this?' he was demanding. 'These are your clothes on this video. What happened to them?'

Gemma sat up. 'Oh Jesus, Steve,' she said, immediately awake as she blinked at the cassette in his hand, scrambling about in her mind for some way to save the situation, or at least delay it until she could sort out damage control. She cursed herself for not leaving it with Angie when she'd had the chance at the police centre. 'This is not a good time. Can we talk about it in the morning?'

'No. We cannot.' He stood there, eyes angry, and also fearful. 'I want to know what this means. What happened to your clothes? Who did that to them?'

Gemma sighed and swung out of bed. She walked out into her sitting room. She could see where Steve had been lying on her lounge, a plate with biscuit crumbs and yesterday's newspaper spread on the floor. Now, he followed her out. She turned and took the cassette from his hands and put it on the table. 'You were never supposed to see that,' she said. 'You had no right to go through my private things.'

'Go through your private things! Give me a break! It was sitting there on top of the "Wizard of fucking Oz".' He was staring at her, demanding an explanation.

She couldn't think of any way out of this except the truth. 'Steve, I spent the night before last at a motel. With someone. When I got up next morning, I found that—' She indicated what he'd seen on the cassette. 'I videoed it. I sent the clothes with the physical evidence to Lance at Paradigm. That's what happened.'

'What physical evidence?'

'He – whoever – had wanked over my pantyhose. As well as slashed them. Stevie, I—'

'Shut up. Just don't say a word.'

'But Steve, it's worse than just what I did. I mean . . . a woman's been murdered. He'd done the same things with her clothes.' She stopped, aware that the woman's death was irrelevant to what was happening between her and Steve right now. He stood up. He went to the dining table, where his leather jacket hung from the back of one of the chairs. The little wrapped gift was perched brightly on the table, and Steve scooped it up and threw it as hard as he could onto the floor where it slid across the parquetry to disappear under the sideboard. Then he turned back to her with a long, hard look. Slowly, he put on his jacket.

'Are you going?' she asked stupidly. Steve walked towards the door, but Gemma got there first and stood in front of it. She wanted to say: 'Please don't go. Please listen to me. I do this sometimes. I don't even know why. You are my good friend; I'm so sorry. I love you and please don't go.' But her tongue baulked at saying those words. Instead she yelled at him: 'Don't be so damned self-righteous, Steve! Don't tell me you haven't been in any of the gang-bangs going down with your hoodlum bikie mates. Don't tell me you haven't fucked someone else in the months you've been away.'

Steve walked up to her, grabbed both her shoulders, picked her up bodily and set her firmly aside from the door as easily as if she'd been a sandwich board. 'I don't fuck you, Gemma,' he said in an angry hiss. '*We* make love. But that seems to be beyond you.' His angry eyes blazed straight into hers a split second, then he swung away to go straight on past her and out the door. He closed it carefully behind him, his controlled anger somehow far worse than a tantrum. She heard his steps leaving, eventually heard the motorcycle start a long way down the road and the angry roar as it accelerated away.

Still standing where Steve had left her, Gemma could feel herself wanting to cry. She wanted to scream out loud in pain and frustration. Instead, she steeled the muscles in her throat and jaw and tightened her neck. Damn you, Steve, she said to herself. Piss off, then. I don't need you. I don't need anyone. I never have.

She went over to the dining table and sat down in the chair Steve's jacket had so recently embraced, staring at the choppy night surf, the breaking crests just discernible under a steel night sky. Just as well I don't need anyone, she thought, because everyone I love goes away. She felt a

headache starting to build up in the back of her neck so she went to the bathroom and found a packet of Digesics. She took two, grabbed Taxi and went back to bed. The drug worked quickly.

EIGHT

Gemma woke late, hung-over from the strong analgesics. The events of last night filled her with gloom and her body felt heavy and sad. She rang Steve's flat but the phone rang out and she hung up, wondering where he was. Maybe in a bar, drinking himself stupid. That was one of his solutions sometimes to the pressures of life. Taxi slipped between her ankles, whingeing for breakfast. 'Shut up, you stupid cat,' she hissed at him. But he was insistent and she relented, opening his favourite cat dinner. This is how I'll end up, she thought bitterly, a bloody woman who lives with a damn cat. She washed her face and went for a walk along the path around Tamarama. For a moment she considered walking along the coastline to Kit, but changed her mind and turned north instead, towards Bondi. She was blind to the brilliance of the morning sea, laced into surf by the wind and with cirrus flying in filigreed mares' tails in a wide blue sky.

When she got back, she showered and arranged to visit Philip Hawker. She left another message for Imelda Moresby.

The day was spent catching up with paperwork, filing reports, doing the accounts and generally tidying up. Gemma's heart was heavy with pretending not to care.

It was early evening when Spinner radioed in. 'Mr

Georgiou is definitely playing out of school,' he said. 'They've been in the motel for an hour and a half. No need to put him to bed. I'll go home now. Got some great stuff on video. They were almost doing it in the car.'

Once, Gemma remembered, she'd videoed Steve as he crossed the road after making an ATM withdrawal and came back to the car, walking around to open the passenger door and get inside.

'Didn't you see me?' Gemma had asked him.

'See you what?' he'd asked, putting his wallet away. Gemma lifted the video camera. 'I was shooting you. You were looking straight at me. I was sure you could see.' She played it back for him, but Steve had shaken his head. During the day, the slightly tinted windows reflected clouds, sky and passing cars and no one seemed to notice a person with a video camera shooting through a slightly opened window. And during the night, the traffic lights and reflections and the general darkness of interiors kept a watcher's secrets.

'Good on you, Spinner.' He signed off.

After making a steak and salad, Gemma couldn't settle down for the night. She prowled around, sometimes sitting on the timber deck, sometimes flopped on the lounge. But some demon made her go out and she was on the way to Bondi almost before she knew it. Instead of driving to the beach to watch the moon on the water she found herself in Curlewis Street, where Steve had his flat. There was no car, of course. He'd left his car with a mate last year when he'd taken the job working alongside the drug squad, only visiting his flat infrequently. There were no lights on and she wondered where he was. He could hardly continue to live there, she realised, now that he'd been burnt by the outlaw gang. He'd need to lie low for some time. Because

of the bust, his evidence wouldn't be needed so he wouldn't have to expose himself in a court, but even so, outlaw bikies were not known for their forgiving natures and it wouldn't be hard to work out who had betrayed them.

She made a U-turn and drove past the flat again. This is pathetic, she thought to herself as she sped off down towards the beach. It was impossible to park on Campbell Parade so she abandoned the car and walked the rest of the way. The beach and its surrounds curved around like the sprawling arc of a Whitely painting, drained of its trademark blue. This beach was all muted greys, darkness and luminosity. In that unseeable sea, monsters could lurk. Gulls wheeled like ghosts in the misty radiance of the powerful lights along the curved walkway, and ahead of her, low breakers rolled in dim parallel lines. Miles out at sea, a thunderstorm pulsed in silence. She shivered, as a jag of lightning split the distance. Somewhere in this city, Gemma thought, was a man who laid out women's clothes in a strange, ritualistic pattern, a man who had killed a woman who interrupted him two nights ago. A man who'd acted out his weird compulsion only inches from her sleeping body. And somewhere, the man that she loved, but couldn't bring herself to say the words, was living. And she didn't have a clue where he was, either. Damn you, Steve, she thought, fighting tears.

Loud music throbbed across the road from the large hotel opposite the beach and she could feel the mindlessness beginning. A few drinks and she wouldn't give a rat's arse about either man. She went straight up to the bar and ordered a Scotch and ice. She sat at the bar, twisting on her stool, looking round the crowded, noisy lounge at the talent. Apart from a couple of men who were drinking alone, most of the men were accompanied by women who all seemed younger and prettier than she was. She scanned the

single men's general appearance, avoiding eye contact. There was one distinct possibility. A suit – she liked suits – sitting by himself in a corner. She picked him as a businessman of some sort; good-looking, well-groomed with dark hair and powerfully built. She liked her men big, liked to feel their physical impact on her body. Her mobile rang in her bag and she fished it out.

'Yes?' she said.

'Gemma. It's me, Shelly. I've heard something from one of the girls. You know I said I'd ask around?'

'Tell me,' said Gemma.

'Jasmine told me about a girl called Bo who had this client tonight. He took all her clothes off and laid them out on the floor, all in order, like you described. Then he got her to lie on top of them. He told her she was not to move. She was to pretend to be dead. She did this and he told her to close her eyes, because she was dead.'

Shelly paused and Gemma could hear her intake of breath. 'But she peeped and just as well she did because he'd taken out this knife. She was up and out of there in a flash, yelling her head off.'

'And what about him?'

'Bastard got away in all the confusion. She's putting the word around the other girls. But you can't warn everyone in this business.'

'Would she talk to me?'

'I don't know. The ex-cop bit might be a problem. I've asked her to ring you.'

Gemma rang off and was putting the phone back in her bag when a voice interrupted her. 'He can't make it?' said the man. 'What a shame. Can I buy you a drink?' It was the good-looking man in the suit who'd somehow picked up the vibe coming from her. He stood too close and he was

smiling as she looked him up and down. He was perfect. No matter what script they used, always in the past she would have ended up going to a hotel with him.

She was aware of the terrible sadness under the anger about Steve, and for one awful moment she thought she might cry. She looked hard at him. She recalled another night and slashed clothes on the floor. She heard Kit saying, 'That's what you do, my Gems. You leave doors open and the hell beings can slip in.'

Gemma put her drink down. This all had to change, she thought somewhere. 'I buy my own drinks, thank you,' she said.

He raised an eyebrow to show he didn't care. 'Suit yourself, darling,' he said. Gemma suddenly saw the contempt that was his real stock in trade. She slid off the bar stool, couldn't bring herself to leave the last of the Scotch, tossed it back and walked out. Halfway back to the car, her unease started building. She reached her car and got into it, starting up the ignition. Bloody men, she thought. A memory of Steve kissing her goodnight and tucking her in before he left one night made her eyes fill with tears. Why is it so damn difficult? Gemma cried all the way home.

NINE

In the morning, Noel came by to pick her up; after a quick coffee, they headed off. During the trip to Camden, Gemma found herself occasionally eyeing Noel on her left as he sat silently beside her, sometimes digging into his bag where he had catalogues and samples of the newest, smartest cameras for covert operations. In the confined space of the car, his male smell was interesting. But she knew what she was up to; that this was a distraction to take her mind off Steve. That's what I do, she thought. When I'm unhappy or anxious, I immediately think about sex to take my mind off the sadness. Kit was right. What the hell's wrong with that anyway? she asked herself. But it wasn't convincing. I can't go on picking up men for the rest of my life every time the anxiety gets to me. Besides, it would be very bad form, she lectured herself, to become sexually involved with one of my operators. Very bad form, very silly. But Noel was safe. He wasn't a hell being. He wouldn't be like a stranger from a club. He was safe, stolid old Noel. And he had a big, hard solid body that she had always found pleasing.

The rural landscape on each side of the freeway gave way to new housing estates, where washing blew on lines, and dinkies and tricycles could be seen in backyards. Domestic

life probably is not for me, she thought. I'll be thirty-five in a minute. Then forty. Steve would never be the sort of person who'd make a good father; undercover work was not the sort of employment taken on by the ideal family man. She tried to imagine him burping an infant and failed badly. She couldn't quite bring herself to see the infant as hers.

'What are you laughing about?' Noel broke the silence.

'I was just thinking of a U/C cop burping a baby,' she said.

Noel turned away, shaking his head. 'This work we do,' he said after a while. 'It's pretty weird.' It wasn't often that Noel said much; he was a silent man as a rule.

'What makes you say that?' she asked.

'Remember when you did that undercover job,' he said, 'the one at Nutramaid?'

Gemma nodded. She'd been put on the payroll on the assembly line because someone was putting ground glass in the cake mix.

'Yes,' she said.

'I've been offered something similar,' he said. 'Full-time job. Undercover. Might mean I'm not available for a month or two.' He flashed a glance at her.

Gemma shrugged. 'I can always put more hours in on the road or get someone on contract. Who's the job with?'

Noel leaned back in his seat, hugging his shoulders to his ears, stretching and moving his back. 'It's not settled yet. I'm not even sure I want to do it. I felt bad last time I did that sort of work. I got to like the bastard. I know, I know,' he said, speaking before she could. 'We're not supposed to get emotionally involved. I know it sounds off, but after you spend hours with someone, drinking with them after work, listening to their shit, hearing their problems, you get to, well, you get to be mates, sort of.' Noel looked across at

her, making sure she was listening, seeing the understanding in her eyes. He turned his attention back to the road. 'Then I had to set him up. Once I was sure he was the one doing the thieving I had to dob him in. Give evidence at court with him looking at me like I was bloody Judas.'

'I didn't get to love my subject at Nutramaid,' Gemma said. 'But he wasn't just thieving. It was a pretty psychopathic thing he was doing. Ground glass in the vanilla sponge, for Chrissake.'

'But you know what I mean,' Noel said.

Gemma looked away. She did. We sit outside their houses and we watch their lives, she was thinking. We end up knowing almost everything about them; their interests, their friends, their weaknesses, their sex habits, their diet, how often they shit. We comb through their rubbish and we know what they like to eat, what toiletries, laundry products, wines, spirits, cosmetics and reading material they like. We know all this about them and they don't even know we're in the world.

'I'm not denying that what my subject was doing was wrong,' said Noel. 'But he wasn't a bad sort of a bastard when you got to know him. He was thieving to pay household bills. Bloody wife always at him for not earning enough. He wasn't a real crim. Then I had to give evidence in court. He was looking at me like I'd betrayed him.'

He paused and wound up his window as a huge rig passed them. 'Which I had.'

'Goes with the territory, Noel. That's why we never get too close. Never get involved.'

'Woman started doing the business on me a few months ago,' he said. 'That Seaforth job. Remember?'

Gemma nodded.

'The old man was playing out of school and I got the video

evidence for her. After she watched it, she rang me. Wanted me to help her make one of her own. To show hubby.'

Gemma couldn't help imagining being in bed with Noel. She took another quick glance at his handsome, calm figure beside her, his good profile and thick hair. She briefly wondered what might happen if she ran her hand over his thigh and into his crotch. 'Did you?' she finally asked.

Noel didn't answer directly. 'He'd been playing up with his daughter's best school friend.' Gemma brought her attention back to the conversation. 'It would blow the whole family apart. His daughter, his wife. The little school friend's family, too.'

Gemma looked sideways at him again. 'Did you make the video? To help the aggrieved wife?'

Noel turned to her and smiled. 'Why?' he asked. 'Do you think I did?'

Gemma looked away. She had to let the matter drop now, or reveal too much. She shrugged. 'None of my business,' she said, staring at an insect that had smeared itself across the windscreen in a pale orange glaze.

'You know something?' he asked and she didn't answer, waiting for him to go on. 'Sometimes I don't like what we do.'

The last of Gemma's erotic thoughts were blown away by her irritation. 'Hell, Noel, we don't *do* anything. We just watch and wait. And gather intelligence about what *they're* doing. Then we hand it over to the relevant authorities. We don't do a damn thing towards creating the messes people make of their lives. They do that all by their own little selves.'

There followed a silence in which Noel shifted gears as he came up close behind a slow driver in the fast lane. 'All we do is focus on what's already going down,' she said.

For some reason that she couldn't fathom, it didn't sound convincing.

Cross Weld Construction was spread over an acre of land surrounded by high cyclone fencing with triple razor wire trim. It had taken Gemma and Noel nearly an hour and a half despite the freeway to arrive at the long, hangar-like buildings set in landscaped, low-maintenance gardens of wiry natives. The office building lay to the right of the gate, with the name of the firm over the double doors in imposing marble-like letters. Scaffolding and the sound of drills screaming through metal reminded Gemma that the works were closed for renovation.

As they pulled over to park, a substantial, well-dressed man came down the steps to greet them.

'Richard Cross,' he said, extending his right hand as Gemma got out of the car. Shrewd eyes narrowed in a good-looking, weathered face and a firm handshake made Gemma take more notice.

'So you're Gemma Lincoln,' he said. There was something in the way he said these words, an oddly personal note, that made Gemma think he'd been expecting something different – or at least someone different. She felt pleased. Too many ex-policewomen have big bums, she thought, and was glad of the gym and her habit of walking to Bondi for coffee. She introduced Noel and they all went into the noise of a building site, a mess of unfitted gyprock, timber linings and large, draped piles of furniture against the walls.

'Come through here,' said Richard Cross, guiding Gemma with a hand under her elbow, 'and I'll show you where the new retail premises are going to be.' He showed them around the office and retail spaces and then the three went outside again, to the large warehouse buildings, locked at the moment

and signed in blue and white squares that 'BlueCheck Security Patrols these Premises'. Wherever they went, both in the office and retail areas as well as in the outlying hangars, Noel noted, scribbled and sketched in his folder, inquiring about the position of wiring and fittings. After half an hour, he'd developed his plan. In the cubbyhole room that served as Richard Cross's office at the moment, they had coffee and Gemma noted the good china cups.

'After the renovations,' he said proudly, drawing their attention to a draftsman's plan pinned on the wall, 'I'll have a decent office looking over the lake.'

'The lake?' said Gemma. Richard went to the window and raised a blind to reveal a huge, bulldozed crater a hundred metres away from the buildings. 'I'm having a lake there,' he said, 'with water lilies all over it. And a red Japanese bridge like in the Monet.' He turned around to face her again. 'Monet is my favourite painter,' he said, and Gemma thought she detected the ghost of an accent in his spoken words. This is a man who has put the past behind him, she sensed. A man who has built a completely new life successfully. I should watch and learn from this.

'It'll be beautiful,' she said. 'Not many building suppliers' yards have a living Impressionist painting on the premises.' She could tell he was pleased by her comment, and she looked at him closely while he and Noel talked about the most suitable places to position the covert cameras.

Richard Cross was probably in his fifties, she thought, but he looked extremely fit and youthful, possibly a legacy of his earlier days in the building trade, to which he'd made references as they walked around his property. He was the sort of self-made man, Gemma thought, that Australia does well; the hands-on maker who later buys the means of production and becomes very rich thereby, because his

knowledge is based on wide, practical experience. He is probably a millionaire, she thought to herself, and now he's widening his world further by seeking pre-selection and a new political direction for his life. And what am I doing? She turned her attention back to the conversation.

'I'm not sure if materials and tools are going out in a system of pilfering,' Richard was saying, 'or in big chunks.'

'This is what I think will work best,' Noel said, checking off the points he'd noted. 'We put cameras over the gates, with sensors so that they're movement activated. That way you get all the comings and goings and you can tally the trucks out against the orders. One camera in each of the warehouses to cover the stores area where stuff is signed in and out, and two cameras in the areas above both tills in the retail section, so that all activity round the tills is also recorded. That way, we get them both ways. If you really want to go the whole hog, we can put an undercover operator on your payroll. But that could be a very costly procedure. At the moment, let's see what can be done just with electronic surveillance. Later, when we've got a suspect or two, might be the time to bring someone on site, if you don't get what you need in the first sweep. I'll go back to the office now and work out the final quote. Then I'll get back to you.'

Richard Cross nodded and then looked at Gemma and smiled. 'I also want a couple of sensor lights to go into my place at Darling Point. Could you do those as well?'

'Of course,' said Gemma. 'I'll see to it myself.'

'Do you always go out on the jobs with your operators?' he asked, green eyes glinting. He had a smile that was never allowed to develop fully but seemed bitten down halfway through, so that his mouth had a quirky tilt to one side that was very attractive.

'Only the important ones,' she said, flirting back as she stood up, ready to leave.

Noel packed away his notes and pen and on the way out, Richard held the door open for them, holding Gemma's eyes just a fraction longer than was necessary for politeness. She felt him move towards saying something and also felt him change his mind. As she walked down the steps she sensed his eyes on her back; it was a good feeling. He was still standing and looking after them as she turned the car, and Gemma felt pleased she'd worn her scarlet suit and good cream blouse.

The moment she walked into her office, the phone rang. She threw the Cross Weld paperwork on the desk as she snatched it up. A girl's voice was on the other end, thin, frightened.

'Is that Gemma Lincoln?'

'Yes, who's this?'

'Bo Bayliss. Shelly's friend.'

Gemma leaned forward in her seat, alert. 'Yes, Bo. I was expecting your call. Thanks. When can we meet?'

'Tonight?'

'Sure. Where? What time?'

'How about before I start work? Seven o'clock at Hernandez?'

'I'll be there,' said Gemma. She pressed the phone connection and immediately dialled Angie.

'Homicide,' Angie answered.

'Hullo Homicide, it's me,' said Gemma. 'I'm hopeful of getting a description of a man.' And she explained the situation to her friend. There was a pause.

'Hey, Gems. Thanks for what you're doing. I really appreciate it. The boss has put me in charge of this investigation and Bruno is totally pissed off. He can't stand having a mere female tell him what to do.'

'Tough toenails, Bruno baby,' said Gemma.

'That's more or less what I told him. But how I'm ever going to work with him I don't know. Would your contact be willing to speak to us?' Angie added.

'I haven't said anything about that,' Gemma told her. 'I don't want to frighten a potential witness by mentioning the police force.'

'Madam,' said Angie drily, 'may I remind you that we're a service now, not a force.'

'I'll keep that in mind,' said Gemma.

'Silver service,' said her friend. 'Next time you're being attacked, don't call the cops. Call a waiter.' Gemma rang off, still thinking of Bruno. There are some men who are completely impossible.

TEN

Kit did the last of the unpacking as the sound of Hildegard von Bingen's music filled the house, spare as bones. There were things she couldn't quite bring herself to throw out. Vases from her old house with Gerald, a large seashell from Crete that he'd given her in the early days and other bits and pieces. I'll probably cart them for another move and then throw them out, she thought. In the bottom of one box, she found a quarto-sized envelope and when she upended it, a collection of children's drawings fell out. They were Will's. Pictures of her and him at the zoo. Several pictures of elephants – he'd been obsessed with elephants, she remembered, never tiring of hearing about them or drawing them. In one picture, a small boy sat on top of a huge green elephant with a trunk that was holding a house up. Inside the house were two figures, and it wasn't hard for her to make out herself and Gerald through the windows. She studied this one until the tears came to her eyes. You couldn't carry it all, Will, she thought. Not even with a huge elephant to help you. She had to stuff them back in the envelope and put them away in a drawer. She rang Alexander to organise next month's supervision visit and then had her meal sitting in the twilit garden.

* * *

The Cross at night is all action. Traffic crawls along Macleay Street; people cross the road as they please, paying little attention to the traffic lights. Not quite as sleazy as it was five years ago, Gemma thought, but spruikers still collar single men and couples too, describing in incomprehensible terms the delights that await anyone who cares to step inside. Gemma drove along the street, past the fountain where tall Nordic backpackers sat on benches studying maps next to burnt-out street drunks and a group of Aboriginal kids waiting around for something to happen. She kept her eye out for the breathalyser boys, worrying that she might be over the limit. She had to drive quite a long way down Greenknowe Avenue before she found a spot.

Walking back to the main drag, Gemma felt the tug to go to a nightclub, drink more and find a man. It would stop the pain of Steve's absence. But for how long? she asked herself. And again she would find herself waking with a stranger.

Near the Pink Pussy Cat Gemma walked past a group of adolescent males ogling the publicity photos in the glass case outside. An almost life-size drawing of a stripper, hugely endowed, with yellow hair piled up in snaky coils and an impossibly pouting collagen mouth had been defaced by someone's crude drawing of a woman's genitals over the area where the stripper's g-string was painted. Gemma kept walking until she'd turned the corner, passed the Hyatt and walked down the hill towards Hernandez' cafe. A coffee will do me good, she thought, stepping inside and looking around. It wasn't hard to pick Bo out from the others in the place. Dead white platinum fringe and even from the doorway, Gemma could see the mark of acne scars on the girl's young face. She squeezed past the piano and the bad portraits. Bo looked up through blue-mascaraed eyelashes, wary.

'Gemma?'

'Yes,' said Gemma, sliding in opposite the girl. Bo blinked, pushing a strand of silver from the painted eyes. The waiter took her order for a strong black and another cappuccino for Bo and Gemma turned her attention to the slight girl opposite. 'Tell me,' she said, 'everything you remember.'

'He was real weird,' Bo said, moving the froth of her cappuccino around with a spoon. 'I was real lucky.'

'You bet,' said Gemma. So was I, she was thinking. Bo lit up a cigarette and blew the smoke sideways. Gemma could see how sick she was. She took out her notebook. 'Tell me everything you can about that jerk,' she said.

Bo looked upwards through her fringe as if the pictures in her memory were hanging a little to one side of her mind. 'He was just ordinary looking,' she shrugged. 'About – I don't know – thirty maybe. I don't take much notice of them. They all look the same to me. Anyway, when I'm on the junk, I'm not seeing too good. He pulls over and I tell him how much and at first he tries to get me to his place.' She stubbed out the half-finished cigarette as the coffees arrived. '"No way," I tell him.'

'What was he driving?'

Bo considered, then shrugged. 'Dunno. Van of some kind. Don't know the make.'

'Colour?'

Again Bo tried. 'Light,' she finally said. 'Maybe white. Or cream. Not black or dark blue or red.'

Gemma scribbled in her notebook. 'So where did you go?'

'We ended up going up the steps to the place I use, just off William Street near the trannies' hang-out. It's just a room with the basics. We go inside and I could tell he was real, you know, uneasy, looking around at everything. Once

we were in the room, he tells me to take all my clothes off and put them on the floor, but in a neat way, like they were on me. In order, you know – blouse on the top and then the skirt underneath and my boots laid out under the skirt like legs.'

Gemma could feel the hair on the back of her neck rising, and an icy tightness round her heart. This is him, she was thinking.

'I don't wear underwear when I'm working,' Bo was saying. 'He seemed to get really angry about that. Demanded that I get some panties from somewhere. Where do you expect me to get them from? I ask him. Apart from that, I do what he says. Anyway, after a bit he calms down and then he tells me to lie on the floor, not on the bed.'

'Didn't you think that was a bit unusual?' Gemma asked.

Bo shrugged, sipping her coffee. Her faraway eyes blinked slowly, like a baby who is very tired. 'Nothing's unusual in this business,' she said. 'When they want me to hurt them, or want me to shit on them or piss on them, that's when it can be a bit – unusual. Or when they want to hurt me. But I'd just had a shot and I was feeling pretty cool. So I did what he said and then he ordered me to close my eyes. I could see that his cock was still soft so I thought he just wanted some privacy while he had a tug or whatever – you know – but I didn't know how long he meant for me to keep them closed. And I've got this talk I do at them, oh baby, that is such a wonderful big cock, I've never seen such a strong one and I tell them how much I want it and how good it'll be for me – that sort of crap.'

She stopped and lit another cigarette and the faraway eyes focused, staring straight at Gemma. 'Do you want to know when it's really good for me?' she asked. 'When I'm so out of it I can't feel anything. That's really good.' She exhaled

and stirred sugar into her coffee. 'So I automatically start doing that oh baby your big dick routine and he yells at me to shut up bitch, you're supposed to be dead. That gives me a fright, you know. Not so much the words, but the loud voice, so I opened my eyes and he had this knife. I tell you I jumped up, I don't know how because I was truly wasted, but I was out that door before I knew it, screaming. I ran down to the front of the house, grabbed someone's coat and ran outside. I just kept running till I came up to Romero's on the corner. I haven't run like that since I got the trophy at school for the hundred metre sprint when I was eleven.'

'It's really important that you try and remember this man,' said Gemma. 'Tell me about his body. His build.'

Bo squashed out her cigarette and poured more sugar into her cappuccino. 'He wasn't much to look at. Smallish. Skinny. But that knife was bloody big. I told Matt at Romero's what had happened and he wanted to ring the cops but I wouldn't let him, so he and Basil walked down with me back to the house but the guy had gone by then. Plus he'd taken my clothes, the fucker.'

'Your clothes?' said Gemma. 'What did he take?'

Bo considered. 'Short yellow skirt, white crop top and my white boots. I loved those boots.'

Gemma noted this down. She looked up again and saw how young Bo was. Maybe not even twenty yet. 'Hair colour?' Gemma asked.

'Lightish brown – you know? Like that girl's over there.' She pointed to someone passing outside and Gemma turned just in time to see a woman with medium to light brown hair.

'Eyes?'

Bo shook her head. 'How would I know?'

'Any distinguishing marks? Tats, scars, that sort of thing?'

Bo shook her head again. 'He was just an ordinary jerk – you know. Just another arsehole. The world is full of them.'

Yes, thought Gemma, but they don't all kill women. 'What was he wearing?' she asked.

Bo considered. 'Jeans,' she said. 'Might have been Levi's. And a shirt. Checked shirt.'

Gemma scribbled again. 'How tall?' she asked.

'Average,' Bo answered. 'Average height.'

She lit up another cigarette and swallowed the last of her coffee. 'Can I have an iced chocolate?' she asked. 'I haven't got any money until I start working.' When the iced chocolate came, Bo spooned the cream and ice-cream out first.

'Tell me anything that comes to mind about this man. If there's one point about him that you can recall.'

'He had a thin little voice,' she said. 'You know. Squeaky.'

Gemma thanked the girl and left her, pushing a twenty under her plate, wondering what it must be like to be a junked-out street worker before your twenty-first. From her car, she rang the details through to Angie's voice mail and then drove home, deciding to have a quick shower and change into something warmer. In the shower, Steve's plastic razor lay across the soap and she threw it out of the recess onto the floor. Then she started sobbing, the hot water running over her tears.

Kit was curled up with a book on the sofa in the lounge room when some tiny sound disturbed her. She looked around the room. Surely there was something moving outside.

She put the book down, and tiptoed out of the room and down the hallway. It was in darkness and she tuned her ears. There it was again; a small sound, but this time she was sure it was outside, in the back garden. She decided against putting

on a light, knowing that she was at an advantage, moving through the darkness down the hall towards the kitchen at the back of the house. In the kitchen, she stopped again. A soft 'plop' sound, as if someone had lightly dropped over the wall of her garden, onto his feet. Now she started to feel alarmed. Alarmed and fearful. She crept to the kitchen window and peered out, keeping well back, turning her head sideways to glance outside. She froze. The dark figure of someone – the outline suggested it was male – was clearly visible in the moonless dim night. Kit jumped in shock.

'Who are you?' she screamed through the window. 'What do you want?' At her words, the man seemed to leap into the air and vanish back over the wall. She heard the sound of breaking vines and somewhere a cat let out a bloodcurdling yell that made her jump again. She slammed the sliding kitchen window closed and locked the back door, standing in the darkness, panting in fright. Relax, her sensible adult voice said. It's just some kid looking for a chance to burgle. You probably gave him a terrible fright. At this, she clutched the sideboard running along the sink, and breathed deeply. Her heart started to slow down. She went around the house, securing windows, checking doors.

Maybe I should get a big dog, she thought. She switched on the light in her room. It was twenty past ten. She picked up the phone.

'Gems?' she said when her sister answered. 'There was someone here,' she told her. 'In the garden.'

'Who?'

'I don't know. Some prowler.'

'What happened?'

'I screamed and he bolted.'

'Probably just some junkie looking for money.'

The image of Will came into her mind. 'Probably,' she

agreed. 'But a couple of times I've gone outside thinking that someone was there.'

Gemma suddenly thought of evil stirring. She shivered. 'Do you want me to come over?' she asked. 'I could stay the night.'

'No. Thanks anyway. I'll be okay. I've locked everything. I think he got a bigger fright than me.'

'You must get grilles on the windows,' said Gemma, thinking of Kit's house backing onto the coastal path around the beaches. Gemma remembered from her 'perv patrol' days what these public areas could be like at night. 'I'm surprised that a house in that position hasn't already been made secure. Hang on a tick and I'll get a card.' Kit waited till her sister returned to the phone. 'These people are good, and reliable.' She gave Kit the number of a wrought-iron manufacturer. 'Promise me you'll give them a ring first thing tomorrow.'

'Yes,' said Kit, jotting the number down. 'I won't be able to relax otherwise.' She hesitated. 'What's up, Gems? Your voice sounds really sad.'

'I've been talking to a street worker,' said Gemma, 'and I'm tired.' She told Kit about the meeting with Bo Bayliss. Kit immediately thought of Clive Mindell's fantasy. Someone else had the same idea, she thought.

'Kit?'

'Yes?'

'Do you ever think of Dad?'

Kit felt the clench in her guts. 'Why do you ask?'

'Because I want to know.'

Eventually, Kit could speak. She felt an unreasonable anger with Gemma for bringing up this subject yet again. 'I think of him from time to time. I think of our mother, too. He took her away from us. He orphaned us with his rage.'

'I don't think he did it, Kit.'

'You've always said that. You were only five when it happened. I remember the terrible fights. I remember his rage.' Her anger was increasing. 'Gemma, this is not a good time to be discussing this. I'd prefer to do it another time. We're both tired.'

'Okay, okay,' said her sister. 'Goodnight. Sleep tight.'

'Goodnight,' Kit replied.

She didn't sleep well. She felt claustrophobic with all the windows and doors locked up and the mention of her parents had disturbed ancient, deep layers in her mind. She was startled awake from agitated dreams of a couple quarrelling violently, and although the figures in the dream were Gerald and herself, she knew they were really her parents. Weird dreams of Will shattering into her house through broken glass woke her in the dawn. At first light, she was out in the garden, noting the broken branches of Boston ivy and the mess of torn leaves on the ground and floating on the pond. Later in the morning, she rang the wrought-iron manufacturers. They could have the job done in a week's time.

ELEVEN

Gemma rang Mrs Georgiou, glancing at her report on the erring husband. 'Hullo?' she said. 'Rose? It's Gemma Lincoln from Mercator.' No matter how often she said what she was about to say, it was always difficult. 'I'm afraid your suspicions are correct. Your husband drove to a motel after work yesterday and met a woman who fits the description of Anneliese Smith. They spent an hour and a half in the motel before walking up the street for dinner. They spent more time in the motel after that and your husband finally left the place at . . .' She checked Spinner's notes for the exact time, 'nine-twenty.' On the other end of the line, she could hear the woman sobbing. 'I'm sorry to be the one to have to tell you this. I'll post the full report and the video. If there's anything more you ever want done, you have my details.' She was adding, 'It's always better to know the truth,' when Mrs Georgiou interrupted.

'But do I?' she was saying. 'They might have gone there for work. Maybe they just needed a quiet place.'

Gemma knew this one, too. She didn't say, 'Look, lady. I know the work they were doing there. There's only one reason in the world that a man and a woman book into a motel for a short time.' But she held her tongue and waited. On the other end of the line, she could hear Mrs

Georgiou adjusting to the information, making it better, more acceptable.

'There's still no real proof,' Mrs Georgiou was saying in a brighter voice. 'There could be some perfectly innocent explanation.' She paused. 'I want to see them—' the woman's voice broke but she cleared her throat and continued. '—I want to actually see with my own eyes. I can't believe my husband would do this. Not after all the promises he made to me. He *swore* to me.'

Gemma closed her eyes briefly; she didn't sigh out loud. 'Mrs Georgiou, we can do something for you. We can organise camera surveillance. But it doesn't come cheap.'

Another pause. Dump him, Rose, Gemma was thinking. Kick the bugger out, sell the house, split it fifty-fifty. Nice house like yours in today's market will bring you a darling unit where you can live in peace without a bloody man to cause you heartache. Nice cat, nice balcony garden. Good china and fancy bathroom. An end to the drops of urine on the bathroom floor.

'I'm going to visit my mother on the weekend,' Rose Georgiou said. 'He'll be here by himself.' Again, the choked sound. Gemma felt their two minds merge as each of them imagined the dark man and his blonde mistress cavorting in the marital bed, Rose safely out of the way with her mother.

'We can fix something up for you. Right over the bed.' It was Gemma who paused. 'Are you sure you want to go through with something like that?' she asked.

'Oh yes,' said the woman. 'I have to know the truth. I must know the truth.'

You know already, thought Gemma. And your refusal to face the truth is worth another six hundred bucks to my business. 'What's a good time,' Gemma asked, 'for us to fit the camera?'

'He's at work all day. What about tomorrow?'

They made a time and Gemma rang off. She walked out onto the deck. Is it always better to know the truth, she wondered? Gemma leaned against the timber rail and looked out at a sea with white-tipped waves racing south. Am I the same as Rose Georgiou, Gemma thought to herself. Is that why I have to know the truth about my father? I can't just leave it at mere belief in his innocence; it has to be proved. And that must be, she realised, because somewhere deep down I'm not sure at all. Somewhere, deep down, do I already know the truth?

Bo Bayliss's blue-fringed stare came into her mind and she thought again of the skinny man with the knife somewhere out there. The image spooked her so much that she hurried back inside and picked up the two-way. 'Tracker Three, copy please.'

He came in straight away. 'Tracker Three, base.' He was always there, she thought. Come in Spinner. She felt reassured and the fear subsided.

'Spinner, can you fit a camera in the bedroom at the Georgious' place tomorrow?'

'Sure thing,' he said. 'She wants action shots? I'll pick it up today.'

'Here's her number. You two work out the installation time. Why doesn't she just dump the deadshit?'

'What she does or doesn't do isn't our business, Boss. And besides that, matrimony is a sacred contract.'

'Sure, Bede. And I need some sensor lights. For a job at Darling Point.'

'The camera hire people won't have those,' he reminded her.

'I'll get them,' she said, and signed off. She grabbed a jacket in case the weather cooled down later in the day, pushed Taxi

off the hall table where he was trying to poke a paw into the vase of daisies, took a straw sun hat and her address book and was just about to leave the house for Seagull Bay when the doorbell rang. When she opened the door, all she could see was a bank of blue irises, white November lilies, golden freesias, poppies and a satin bow. The huge floral arrangement was being supported from behind by a short, almost invisible delivery man.

'Miss Gemma Lincoln?' he asked.

'Who wants to know?' she said, as the scent of the lilies almost made her faint. 'They're gorgeous,' she said.

'They're yours,' he said. 'If you're Miss Lincoln.'

'I admit it,' she said, wondering if Steve had suddenly been overcome by forgiveness. She took the tower of irises and lilies from him, thanked him and closed the door behind her, setting the flowers on the dining room table beside the heavy silver vase that always stood in the middle. The blooms looked glorious against the blue and white of her furnishings and the misty expanse of the sea beyond. She tore the card open. 'You're beautiful', it said. She turned it over. There was nothing else. No signature. She felt a chill.

Gemma ran out to the front door then up the steps onto the road. Nothing. Just the usual parked cars. Back inside, she checked the florist's card again. It was a small, pale pink deckle-edged card in a matching envelope, miniature stationery that Gemma knew could be bought in just about any paper shop. There was no name or identifying mark on it. She ran back inside, frustrated and angry. It just happened in a flash and I let it happen like a lamb, she thought. Now, the cloudy pile of blue, white and gold, reflecting on the polished wood like floral tributes on a coffin, seemed ominous. Who's done this and why? She thought again of the joker in the green Ford. She went into

her office and picked up the two-way, switching it on. 'Base to Tracker Three.'

'Yes, base.' Spinner's voice penetrated the radio fog and crackle.

'I think I've just been pinged,' she said. 'I feel like a goose.' She told him what had happened.

'Did you get a look at the geezer?'

'Through a pile of lilies. Small. Fiftyish? I don't know. Dark.'

'Maybe it's legit,' he said. 'You're a good style of woman. A secret admirer.'

'Sure. Maybe it was some other operator's counter-surveillance. Maybe we've been burned on one of our jobs and this is a message.' She remembered the times of sitting in the surveillance car with the suspect seemingly looking straight at her and her camera, tensely waiting for him to storm over and demand to know what she thought she was doing. It had never happened.

'Possible,' Spinner said. 'But they'd want us to know who they were. How smart they are.'

She rang off. The floral arrangement perfectly suited the blue and white curtains and cushions of her living area. Even the occasional touch of gold was reflected in the large poppy buds, splitting to show the densely packed petals within. They were perfect and they had to go. She picked up the flowers and carried them out of the house, to dump them on the top of someone else's wheelie bin.

'Why don't you want them?' Gemma turned to see the Ratbag, coming up behind her, a frown on his always serious face. 'What's wrong with them?'

'Nothing,' she said. 'Nothing's wrong with them. They just don't match my decor,' she lied.

'What's a decor?' he wanted to know. He had watchful

eyes that seemed always narrowed and Gemma realised two things: that he would be a very handsome man when he grew up and that she'd never seen him smile.

'It's how you furnish your place. Colour schemes. Curtains. That sort of thing.' He nodded. 'Your mum might like them,' she offered and his stern face lightened a bit. 'She loves flowers,' he said. 'But she'd probably think I've pinched them.'

'Do you do that sort of thing?'

The Ratbag looked away. 'Tell her I gave them to you,' Gemma said. 'She can check with me if she wants.'

The Ratbag hoisted the arrangement off the top of the wheelie bin and started off down the steep steps, taking them one at a time like a much younger child. He stopped and turned halfway down and from Gemma's perspective it looked as if the floral arrangement had grown a lower body and two skinny legs in school shoes. 'You're a private investigator,' he said from behind the lilies. 'Mum said that sort of work attracts a certain element. What does that mean?'

'Did she now? What else did she say?' But the lilies didn't answer.

'Have you shot anyone?'

'No,' said Gemma. 'I haven't.'

'Do you have a gun?' Gemma shook her head. There was no need for the Ratbag or indeed anyone to know about the licensed .38 locked in her bedside drawer. She saw the Ratbag peering through a gap in the arrangement. 'Why not?' he said. 'On television, all the private investigators have guns.'

'Life is not like television,' she said. 'I don't have any reason to carry a weapon. I used to though,' she said, to help him out. 'I used to be a cop.' There was a pause. She wasn't sure how this would go down with the Ratbag.

'Why did you stop being one? Did you roll over?'

'No,' she said, laughing. 'I didn't roll over.' I should've, she thought, suddenly serious. I should've rolled over and over and collected those other bastards while I was down there. She thought of Davey and Hendricks and how they were both Team Leaders now.

'Well, why then?'

'It's a long story,' she said.

His dark eye still peered through the flowers and he tried another tack. 'Do you do martial arts?'

Gemma shook her head again. 'No,' she said. 'But I can move quickly.'

'You mean in a fight?' The Ratbag sounded more hopeful.

'No,' said Gemma, disappointing him again. 'Away from one.'

That did it and the pile of lilies continued wobbling down the steps. Gemma watched him struggle with the arrangement and the key as he battled to open his front door. Mrs Ratbag was something flash in the corporate world and Gemma rarely saw her. My work attracts a certain element she was thinking as she went inside; the lost, the lonely, the suspicious, the hurt.

As she left the northern suburbs and turned onto the Gosford freeway, her heart felt a little lighter. Occasionally, when her thoughts about Steve became too sad, she thought about the millionaire who'd flirted with her.

In under two hours, she'd arrived at Seagull Bay. This small coastal community of retired people, holiday makers and the small shopkeepers who serviced them was very different from the country around Camden way, and soon she was responding to the holiday feeling in the breeze off the

ocean, the scent of suntan cream and hot chips from the shopping mall, budding frangipanis and hibiscus. Even though summer hadn't officially begun yet, it was certainly here, in Seagull Bay, waiting to spread all over the state. The sea was aquamarine and the sky above it pale blue. It would be nice, she thought to herself, to come here with a millionaire and lease a magnificent house on the water and look out to sea, sipping gin and tonics.

Philip Hawker was expecting her and was already sitting on the verandah in his neat cottage, shaded by palms, a Norfolk pine and a bougainvillea that would soon be covered in flaming scarlet blossom. As she walked up the slight rise to the house, the wind rustled the palm leaves and Gemma wished for a minute she could live here with Taxi and Steve, swim every day and never go out on surveillance again. Philip Hawker, leathery tan and bright in a Hawaiian shirt, offered her the wary half-smile of a long-serving police officer as he put out his hand.

'Nice to meet you again.'

'Again?'

'You don't remember. I talked to you and your sister back then.' His dark eyes looked straight into hers. 'You were only a little thing. Smart as paint, though.'

'I can't remember very much about it,' said Gemma, aware of deep disquiet stirring in her. 'Just patches of it here and there.'

'Sit down and I'll get you a drink. Tea? Coffee?'

'Coffee would be great,' she said. 'Black and one.'

He disappeared back into the house and Gemma realised he was enjoying her presence as a social call as well as a matter of old business. Across the roofs of the houses over the road, she could see the haze of the ocean, ruffled with low waves. Soon would be her birthday, the thirtieth anniversary of the

terrible matters she was investigating. Her birthday was like a tombstone. Philip Hawker returned with a tray and two steaming mugs. 'You'll have to take me as you find me,' he said. 'The missus stays in Sydney during the week and I batch most of the time.' He laughed. 'Suits me,' he added.

Gemma took the mug he handed her and he sat down on the other side of the table. A flight of lorikeets screeched overhead and she watched them disappear into trees at the far end of the street.

'You obviously got the statement okay,' he said. Gemma nodded. 'I've gone through all my boxes of stuff and I've found some photographs.' He paused. 'They're pretty hard going. Of your mother and the crime scene. And your father's jacket and trousers.'

It suddenly occurred to Gemma that she hadn't really considered how this action of hers might affect her. This was not just a matter of another investigation. This was the black album of her family. She couldn't respond for a second.

'You all right?' Hawker was asking. He went back into the house and came out with a heavy manila envelope. He passed it to her. 'Here's what I could find. Mostly photographs. There are some of my notes and other bits and pieces. You're welcome to keep them. I won't be needing them back.'

'Thanks,' she said, taking the envelope from him. 'I don't suppose they're the sort of thing anyone would want to keep really,' she found herself saying. 'Not the family album sort of thing.' The attempted joke did nothing to settle the agitation she was experiencing, and the envelope lay on the table between them like a letter bomb.

'I've gone over my notes, too,' he said. 'I hate to have to say this to you of all people, but my feeling is the jury were one hundred per cent right.' He compressed his lips in a gesture

of regret. Gemma looked at the envelope. She couldn't bear to open it just now, especially not in the company of a man who believed her father was a vicious murderer.

'Tell me what makes you say that,' she said, practising her professional skill and keeping her voice neutral.

'It's not just the bloodstain evidence,' he said. 'Although that was very damning. Both the government analyst and the scientific squad agreed that the pattern of blood on the jacket could only have been made by impact spatter and arterial spurting while the murder was taking place.' He paused and Gemma experienced an odd feeling of unreality, as if they were talking about something that had happened in a movie or a book and that the blood he was referring to had not come from the body of the woman who had been her mother. Philip Hawker continued in a quieter voice. 'There was also another woman involved.'

Gemma felt as if someone had kicked her in the stomach and Hawker noticed. 'You didn't know that?' he asked, then answered it himself. 'Of course you wouldn't have. It's the sort of thing that families don't tell children. And maybe no one in the family knew.' He paused. 'What happened to you and your sister afterwards?'

Gemma was relieved at the chance to change the subject. 'We lived with my grandmother and an aunt for a while. Then we were sent away to boarding school.'

The old bitter memories swirled, the years of knowing that no one really wanted them, that they were a problem and a burden to everyone, the lies she and Kit concocted about their diplomat father and mother who were always 'overseas', the terrifying and constant threat of exposure, despite their new name, the shame, the almost unbearable shame that not only did they have no mother, but the community believed that she had been slaughtered by their father. What are you giving

your dad for Father's Day? school friends would ask. And Mother's Day? A file in a cake for one, she'd think bitterly, and flowers on the grave of the other. And now, increasing her retrospective anger, was this other damn woman. She felt an absurd hatred for her. This was a severe jolt. What else don't I know? she wondered.

'They were very difficult days,' she finally said. 'We didn't dare let anyone get too close to us. We had to stay apart from everyone. Thank God we had each other.' She looked at him. 'I don't know why I'm telling you this,' she said. 'I never talk about it. Not to anyone.'

Philip Hawker smiled. 'People tell me things,' he said. 'Maybe it's because I've learned how to listen after nearly forty years in the job.'

'And the other woman?' Gemma asked, finding it difficult to say the phrase.

'She was another doctor,' said Philip. 'I spoke to her a few times. Good style of a woman. She lived at Pymble in a big house. Funny how some places you never forget."

'What was her name?'

'Wylde. Dr Rowena Wylde. She had a practice in the northern suburbs. I talked to her and she would have made a statement but I can't seem to find it anywhere. I may never have had it. You could try the court archives, or maybe the DPP.'

'Wasn't the evidence that convicted my father based on bloodstain interpretation rather than around his extra-marital interests?'

Hawker considered. 'Yes. Expert opinion argued that the pattern across his jacket was the same as that on the wall of the room, that of impact splatter.Your mother's blood splashed onto him and the wall during the time of the attack.' Gemma winced, hearing the reference to her mother,

remembering the geyser of arterial blood that had fanned out of a man's arm while she struggled to apply a tourniquet when she'd been first on the scene at a knifing. 'There was also a footprint found next to the body that was never accounted for,' Philip Hawker continued. 'The prosecution argued it was one of your father's shoes but that he'd somehow disposed of them and his bloodstained clothes before the police came. The defence said it was the real killer's because none of your father's shoes matched it.'

'But surely the place was searched thoroughly?' Gemma asked.

'Yes. But there was a delay of nearly twenty minutes before the ambulance and the first of the police arrived. The prosecution argued that that gave him time to dump them away from the house, have a shower and clean himself up.'

He'd have to be moving, thought Gemma. In her imagination, the past was reactivated. The dining room french doors stood open to admit a killer and her father cradled his dying wife in his arms. She swallowed hard; she wanted to go, to digest all this new information. She wouldn't bother with chasing Dr Wylde's statement, she thought, she'd trace the woman herself. She stood up. 'Thanks for all of this,' she said, indicating the envelope.

'I don't have anything else to do these days except to spread peace and light,' said Hawker, smiling. He walked her down to her car.

Gemma turned to him at the gate. 'I'm involved in another investigation,' she found herself telling him. 'The murder of that woman at Maroubra?'

Philip Hawker nodded. 'How are you involved?' he wanted to know, and Gemma told him about her connection with Angie. 'The man we're after might have visited a prostitute,' she said. 'A girl was nearly attacked with a knife.'

'I'm glad I'm out of all that these days,' he said. 'It seems light years away since I was in the job.'

'You've made a good life here,' she said. 'You must be a contented man.'

He nodded. 'It's not a bad life. Anything more I can do to help, just let me know.'

'One day,' she said, only half joking, 'I might come back and ask you how it's done.' She thanked him and left.

She drove back to Sydney, bought two powerful sensor lights for Richard Cross's place, rang him for his Sydney address and made a time to install the lights with Noel, who had his ticket in electrical engineering, then spent some hours filing reports and catching up with letters and other paperwork.

Her mind processed her father's case. A footprint that was never accounted for. And a sound that made the next-door neighbour look out the window almost half an hour before her father arrived back at the house. Now that I've got these photos, she thought, I can present them to Dr Zelda Fireworks and maybe she'll see something the so-called experts missed all those years ago. If she can cast serious doubt in any way on the original interpretation, Gemma thought, I could submit an application to the Supreme Court requesting a Section 475 inquiry. And if a judge then directs that there *are* grounds for such an inquiry, my father's name might be cleared.

This thought, with all its implications, started Gemma's mind whirling. Massive publicity, massive compensation; a huge re-ordering and reshuffling of the known; documents destroyed and remade, archives altered, statements changed, a verdict overturned. The clearing of my father's name will clear my own, Gemma thought. And Kit's too. No longer would we be the children of a killer, with the mark of Cain

on us. Maybe then I'll be able to settle into an ordinary life, instead of being considered the daughter of a murderer and his victim. Her mind kept turning compulsively to the memories of her slashed clothing and Bo Bayliss's account of the skinny man with the knife. She went to the hi-fi and turned up Triple M, hoping the noise and beat would drive her thoughts away. *'High voltage, high voltage, high voltage rock and roll,'* she sang. Her mind remained too agitated to allow her to do any but the most mundane clerical work.

Half an hour later the envelope of photographs sat still unopened on her desk. Several times she almost opened it, but pulled back; she knew the time had come for her to tell Kit everything and she wanted her sister with her when she opened the envelope. She grilled herself a piece of salmon and drank two glasses of chardonnay, then said 'Fuck it' out loud to Taxi, who was curled up on a chair, and picked up the bottle again. Taxi blinked at her a couple of times then closed his eyes again.

'Okay,' she said, 'I won't.' She put the bottle down again. The sadness about Steve overwhelmed her and she grabbed the heavy old cat, taking him out to sit on the deck with her looking at the dark sea with tears running down her face. I shouldn't have had even those two drinks, she told herself, while my heart is so fragile. But that didn't stop the tears. She rang Kit and said she needed to talk to her and would be over later for a nightcap.

As she swung her car around the corner to Kit's, the headlights lit up the remains of a flattened ring-tailed possum on the road, paper thin, his perfectly curled tail scrolled around like the lower half of a treble clef.

Kit opened the door smiling and Gemma followed her into the house, carrying the large envelope. 'You've got it looking

good already,' Gemma said. 'Have you done any more out the back?'

The two sisters walked through the house and into the back garden, where Gemma examined the breaks in the Boston ivy. 'Did you ring that bunch about security grilles?'

'I did,' her sister said. 'What's wrong? Why have you been crying?'

Kit could always tell, thought Gemma. She shook her head. 'Me and Steve,' she said. 'I think it's over.' She paused. 'I would have mentioned it earlier except I felt—' She stopped. The feeling she was baulking at expressing to her sister was shame. She put the envelope on the ground next to the pond and stirred up the water, running her hands through its murkiness. It's now or never, she thought, turning to look at her sister.

'Did you know our father was involved with another woman at the time of our mother's death?' she asked Kit.

Kit, who had been sitting near her sister on the sandstone coping of the pond, now suddenly stood up. Her face was like a mask and Gemma prayed for her to soften. Finally, Kit answered. 'No,' she said. 'I didn't. And I'd like to know how come you know.'

Gemma took a deep breath and stood up herself. 'I visited the detective who was on our father's case in 1967.' She indicated the envelope. 'I've got some crime scene photos,' she said, 'of our mother's body. And our father's clothes.' She saw Kit inhale in shock. She continued. 'Kit, I'm going to work to have his case re-opened. There have been a lot of changes in blood pattern interpretation over the last fifteen years.' She paused before saying the last bit. 'You also should know I've been visiting him.' She found it hard to say 'our father'.

Kit seized the envelope and walked back into the house,

leaving Gemma sitting alone outside. 'I don't believe he did it,' she heard Gemma call, as she pulled the photos out in the bright light of the kitchen. Kit looked through the shots quickly, shoving each one roughly behind the other. A terrible blackness covered the image of her mother's broken face and upper body, and more of the glinting blackness pooled near her smashed head. The starkness of the blood against the whiteness of her mother's broken skin and features destroyed Kit's defences. She was aware of her own breathing and the pumping of her heart. A bloody footprint on the carpet near her mother's crushed profile showed crepey tracks from the sole. Kit focused on these, but it was too late. Suddenly she couldn't see properly and it was the tunnel vision of shock. She swung round with the pictures still in her hand and strode back outside to where Gemma was hunched by the pond.

'This is what he did!' she heard herself say to her sister in a low, tight voice. 'Here are the pictures of what that man did to our mother. With a bloody hammer. She was so, so—' The word stuck in her throat. '—*little*.' She stood there, frozen to the spot. 'And you want to start it all up again. You want to save him. Why, Gemma? Why?'

Gemma looked at her with stricken eyes. 'Because, Kit—' she started to say.

'Look what he did to her!' Kit interrupted. 'He smashed her face. Her head. Look! Look at this and see what he did to her!' She shoved the picture in Gemma's face. 'Take a look!' Gemma sat clenched with the picture too close for her to see. 'Why do you want to go back into all this horror again? Leave it in the past where it belongs. You're nearly thirty-five. You're not the baby any more. Face the fact that he was found guilty of an atrocious crime. I have. You must too.' Kit suddenly stopped, pulled the photograph back from

her sister's face, and stood silent, hesitant and distressed. The two of them remained frozen a second in a white-hot silence. Then Kit threw the photos down, swung round and went back inside, where she started banging the kettle onto the stove, lighting the gas, swearing when the match burnt out and the gas wouldn't ignite. Gemma followed her in, unsure of what to say or do. She waited, standing by the doorway.

Finally Gemma took a deep breath. 'Kit,' she said to her sister's back, 'I knew you wouldn't be in agreement with this. But at least I hope you will respect my right to do it even if you can't be with me. Even if you're against what I'm doing.'

She was stunned to see Kit suddenly cover her face with her hands and start sobbing. Immediately she went to her, hating to see her sister so distressed, but Kit shrugged her off. 'I've got to get a handkerchief,' she said, disappearing for a moment. Gemma heard the sound of noisy nose-blowing. 'Okay,' Kit said, reappearing from the bedroom, her voice trembling with emotion. 'You are quite within your rights to do what you think is best. But I just want you to consider my position in this. You were five. I was twelve. I remember the terrible fights, the screaming, the abusive language. I can't forget what I saw. We were all frightened of him. I saw him hit her once and I have never forgotten the horror that caused me. You don't remember any of that.'

Gemma stared at her sister. She had never seen her in such a state before.

'The person who is our father was a brutal man who could not contain his rage and he killed our mother because of that. He might have been a highly qualified psychiatrist to some people, but he was a very rotten husband and lousy father. I know our mother was a depressed person, and not easy to live with. Any child brought up in that awful Methodist

household would have been depressed. She'd have had the life squeezed out of her.' She lowered her voice a little. 'I refuse to go into any moralising about it; I'm a therapist, not a priest or a magistrate. And it's not my business to investigate *his* childhood either, even though the answers would undoubtedly be there.'

'Is that what you're really angry about?' Gemma said, 'that I *am* investigating him in some way and you're not?'

Kit stood still and stared at her.

'I mean, are you angry,' Gemma continued, 'because I'm somehow doing the thing you won't or don't want to do?'

Kit's face darkened. 'Are you accusing me of some sort of jealousy?' she said. 'Some sort of meanness?'

'No, Kit, it's just that—'

'It's just that you refuse to face the truth,' her sister said. 'You can't accept that I want no part of it. That man did what he did and now he's paid the price and he's coming out of prison. That's how it is. And I don't want to have any sort of relationship with him. As far as I'm concerned, he died too, that night. It's easier for me to think of them as both dead. That's how I've done it all this time, Gemma. That's how I deal with it. You must deal with it in your own way.'

The kettle was steaming and Gemma automatically turned the gas down. She passed the teapot over to Kit, who poured the boiling water. 'Is that how you've dealt with Will, too? By telling yourself he's dead to you as well?' The words were out of Gemma's mouth before she could stop them.

Kit put the lid on the teapot and her voice was low with anger. 'Why do you say that?'

'I just wonder, that's all,' said Gemma. 'I know I'm naive about all this psychological stuff and I haven't got your expertise. You're the psychotherapist. But even I know that

how you feel about your father must influence how you are with the other males in your life. I can work that out and I'm only an ex-cop. You haven't got a monopoly on interpreting the past.' She turned and looked out the window. 'Maybe it surprises you that I often wonder how our childhood plays out in my life? Maybe my reckless behaviour every few months is a result of that?'

Kit reached up into the cupboard for the honey jar. 'You remember what it was like for us,' she said. 'Always terrified we'd be discovered by the authorities. Remember that dreadful boarding school, the Reverend Mother who told us our mother was a saint in Heaven and our father would burn in Hell for eternity. And the nun who told me that I was prone to evil and had the blood of a murderer in my veins. The cruelty of those women and the lies we had to make up for the other girls and teachers. The lies we had to *live*. Our whole childhood was a lie. I was always terrified one of the girls would find out. Most of them knew something weird was going on.'

Kit turned and leaned against the bench behind her, tears running down her face that she made no attempt to hide or stop. 'We did what we had to to survive,' she said. 'We were brave, amazing children who coped with the cruelty of adults in the best way we could. You lost your mother and father physically when you were five and I was twelve. But we'd never really had them before that. A deeply depressed woman can't mother her children, and a fiercely ambitious man can't be a father. I think we were heroic. Many children are. I wish I'd had the understanding I have now when Will was little.' Again, Gemma went to comfort her sister and again, Kit brushed her away. 'I don't see us as living a lie,' she added. 'We dealt with things in our own way and we supported each

other. There was no alternative. We had to have a cover story to survive.'

'Like undercover agents,' Gemma said.

'Exactly so,' said her sister. 'We grew up as undercover agents.' She turned to Gemma. 'But,' she said, 'I've resigned from that kind of work. You're still doing it. And part of working under cover is to discover something that's hidden. I'm not going to go into the psychologising of why you would want to spend your energy like that – what you're avoiding in your own life. That's your business. But I don't have to do that, Gemma, and I will not have anything to do with it. As far as I'm concerned, you're looking for something that doesn't exist.'

'OK, I get the message,' Gemma said sharply. 'Maybe there are issues in my life I'm not dealing with right now. But you're not so perfect either.'

Kit looked at her. She remembered Alexander saying that whenever anything dreadful happens, make a cup of tea and have a bath. 'Look,' she said, 'I'm not claiming to be perfect.' She took the milk from the fridge and set it down near the two cups and saucers. 'Do what you must, but keep me out of this. I don't want to know.'

'But Kit, I've always had you on my side,' Gemma said. 'It feels so bad for me to know that you're not with me in this. I feel lost. I've never had this sense before.'

Kit turned back to the tea things. 'Part of growing up is to do the things you have to, even when there's no support, Gemma. Part of being an adult is supporting yourself when there's no one else. Especially in the face of hostility.'

'I could do without the sermon,' said Gemma. She tried another tack. 'Kit, you're the psych, I'm the cop. I've always thought of us as having two very different jobs. I want to find out *what* happened, and you want

to find out *why* it happened. I know it's very oversimplified but that's how I've always seen us. But in this case, you don't want to know what *or* why.' She shrugged. 'Maybe *you* need to ask yourself about that. I'm not the only one who might have motives that are hidden from me.'

Kit looked up at her from pouring the two cups of tea. She went to say something, then stopped. Finally, she spoke. 'There's something else that troubles me,' she said. 'And it's got nothing to do with the facts of what's going on between us. Or between you and – *him*. I know you don't see things like I do, but when certain old stuff that's been dormant for a lifetime is reactivated it attracts new energies. You don't know what you'll stir up going back into this. It can be very dangerous. I see it in my clients all the time and I warn them about it. I tell them to take extra care when crossing roads. And when driving. You can't avoid disturbing a lot of old demons. I think you should be aware of that, at least. And stay mindful. Because, Gemma, what you stir up won't only affect you.'

After Gemma left, Kit spent some time sitting in the garden with her tea. Light from the kitchen window fell in shafts across the grassy edge and the ivy that lined the wall behind the pond. Her mind was disturbed by Gemma's words. Will had accused her during one of their terrible fights of hating men. 'You do hate me!' he'd screamed. 'You hate all men. You hate Dad. You hate your own father. You're full of hate. This family's *fucked*!' Now, some years later, Gemma's remarks were provoking her. She stood up and threw the rest of the tea into the pond. Some of the drops splashed the stone face set in the wall and Kit stood a while, looking at the Medusa-like face and its sightless

eyes. Is it true, she wondered? Do I hate men? In the sky a waning twilight moon peered between scudding clouds and she went back into the house, her heart heavy with foreboding.

TWELVE

Kit's words of warning haunted Gemma all the way to Darling Point. She'd grabbed a cab and Noel was already sitting in his van waiting for her outside the address in Eastpoint Avenue where the huge Moreton Bay figs dripped darkly in a soft rain. The tower they were visiting had its foundations a long way beneath the roadside and Richard Cross was on the fifteenth storey. There were five levels beneath road level and ten above. 'Ritzy joint,' said Noel, as they walked across a footbridge from the footpath to the entrance foyer on the fifth floor. They pressed the button for the lift and went up to the tenth. Richard Cross's door opened to their knocking. Gemma noticed he'd just had a shave and was wearing a beautiful shirt of some soft, expensive fabric. Was it disappointment, she wondered, that moved like a shadow across his face when he saw that Noel was with her? 'Would you mind taking your shoes off?' he asked. 'It's an idiosyncrasy of mine. I like to leave the outside world at the door.'

She kicked off her high-heeled red sandals with relief and stepped onto the luxurious carpet. She was wearing a tailored suit with a figure-hugging, cream lace body suit instead of a blouse. Richard Cross's unit was furnished simply; it was almost minimalist in its spartan lines and black, white and

pewter. Brown and dark red were the colours that dominated the living room: deep leather lounges, a huge oil painting on the western wall and a life-size Melanesian carving whose wide eyes were outlined with cowrie shells and whose penis hung to his ankles.

'Where do you want the sensor lights?' Gemma asked.

'I want one on the fifth floor,' he said, 'where the footbridge comes into the foyer. There are lights there, but they're very dim, they're always going out and it takes ages to get them replaced. I'll need to discuss this with the Body Corporate. Which is largely me.' He smiled. 'I've got the numbers.' He led them towards the northern rooms, where a balcony overlooked Sydney Harbour. In the rain, the sea and the sky were indivisible, with only the slow-moving lights of ferries and small craft differentiating water from land.

'It must be stunning in sunshine,' Gemma said.

'It is,' said Richard, pleased. 'I hope you can see it soon in all its beauty.'

He showed them where he wanted the other light installed – on the north-facing balcony, so that it shone directly down into the small tubs of rainforest shrubs against the balcony wall. 'I want the sensors set,' he said, 'so that anyone moving onto the verandah will make the light come on. Any cat burglars will be spotlit.' He laughed. 'I doubt if anyone could climb up here, but it'll make a lovely show of my rainforest area.'

While Noel looked for junction boxes for the wiring and then drilled the wall to install the light, Richard poured them all a drink.

'Not for us,' said Gemma.

'But it's after hours,' he said.

She smiled. 'After hours is often when we're busiest.'

'Of course,' he said. 'Keeping all us honest citizens safe.'

For some reason, he seemed to find that situation amusing. 'You don't mind if I have a Scotch,' he said.

'I'll join you,' said Gemma, 'once we've finished the job.' She helped Noel work out the most efficient angle on the sensor box under the powerful light, then she and Richard stood while Noel walked in and out of the doors, activating the north balcony light. The dense green foliage growing in handsome pottery containers looked magnificent when lit up.

On the way home, Noel looked over at her. 'He fancies you,' he said. 'He was watching you.'

Gemma felt pleased. 'You're not jealous are you, Noel?'

He wouldn't answer her, just changed gears noisily and turned east into New South Head Road.

When Kit woke, it was just dawn. Her dreams had been troubled and she'd awoken several times to find moonlight on her face. She made a cup of tea and took it out into the garden. Over the stone wall, the Pacific swung in and out, pushing at the cliffs and rocks that confined it. Kit sat near the pond listening to its restless energy, always beating against coasts. The sightless eyes of the Medusa face stared into hers and she thought about men.

The fight with Gemma of the night before had struck home. It was true that she had no loving male relationship in her life, apart from Alexander. Her father was forbidden entry to her heart and mind, her son had been turned out of the house and she had been estranged from her husband for years and was now divorced from him. I have to start healing myself from the loss of father, son and husband. She put the cup down, went inside to light the candle that stood next to Will's picture and brought it outside. It flickered in the dark garden from its position on the coping of the pond,

casting a small and moving circle of light around itself. Kit closed her eyes and sighed. I need to take the right action, she thought.

Gemma was woken, startled, by the phone. She fumbled for it, noticing that it wasn't yet five o'clock.

'Gemma. He's struck again. The effigy killer.' Angie's voice, thready with tension. For a second, Gemma didn't know what she was talking about. 'He's taken a young girl from her house,' said Angie. 'I'm ringing from there now.'

'How do you know it's him?' Gemma asked.

'Come and have a look yourself,' said Angie. 'I'll get you in somehow. I'll meet you outside.' And she gave Gemma the address.

Thirty-five minutes later, Gemma pulled up outside the cordoned-off address in South Coogee, parking behind one of two police cars outside the well-proportioned house. It was a triple-fronted solid brick place with an added timber pergola across the front entry and double doors opening onto a paved terrace. Several television vans were parked on the street and Gemma recognised one of the journalists she'd worked with years ago. She was still dopey from lack of sleep and the early hour. In the east, the sky was streaky pink gold with layers of dark red and grey and she pulled her jacket closer around her, grabbed her video camera and got out of her car. Ahead of her, a uniform standing near the kerb was turning the television crews away. Across the road, Gemma noticed a heavy middle-aged man watching the scene with great interest, leaning against a low brick wall, as if the whole business had been staged for his enjoyment. She turned her attention back to the house and the police officer standing outside, recording the details of those present at the crime scene.

'Hullo, Mick,' she said to him, hoping to avoid argument by moving quickly. 'Remember me?' He squinted and shook his head. But behind him, she could see Angie hurrying towards her. 'She's okay, Mick,' her friend was saying. 'She's helping with the inquiry. She's a witness.'

'Get his name, too,' Gemma said, jerking her thumb in the direction of the heavy man across the road. 'Get the details of anyone watching this.'

'Yes,' said Angie, who'd come up to join them. 'Anyone taking an interest. Next-door neighbours. The lot.'

'I know how to do my job,' Mick said.

'Good to hear it,' said Angie brightly, and the two women left the footpath and hurried past a stuffed wheelie bin standing next to the fence at the road end of the driveway.

Gemma looked around. All the lights were on inside the comfortable, middle-class house where a large open living section gave onto a hall that led to the other rooms, the kitchen and outside decking. Fingerprints had been here already, leaving their white frosting on the surfaces and the glass of the window panes. Gemma followed Angie down the hall to a bedroom filled with the posters, ornaments, mementos and stuffed animals of adolescent girls, noticing the two beds over her friend's shoulder, one stripped, its bedding already on the way to the government laboratory where analysts would examine every fibre, hair and particle of dust and the fabric as well.

Once inside the bedroom, Gemma's eyes were drawn immediately to the floor. Again, women's clothing. This time, though, it was not carefully laid out in the shape of a woman. The clothes were just dumped on the floor, all in a pile, with shoes and stockings at the bottom and the skirt and blouse on top. And this time, he'd laid out a string of pearls and two pearl earrings on either side of the

pile. Gemma swung her camera out of its bag and started filming, taking in the carpet, the bedroom, the stripped bed, the knocked-over chair, the small jewel case lying on the floor with its tiny ballerina stalled at an impossible angle.

'But it doesn't look like him,' she said, straightening up and stopping the camera. 'The clothes aren't laid out.' She looked carefully round the carpet near the clothing, noticing the fallen chair. 'Can't be a copycat, Angie. It's very different.'

Flashlights popped around them, as a police photographer took pictures from all angles of the room. Angie looked up from her little notebook. 'Nobody would know what to copy anyway,' she said. 'We've never released details. We've only said he appears to handle certain things belonging to the women. Take a sniff down there,' she suggested, and Gemma squatted down near the clothes where the scent of perfume was strong. 'He's used perfume this time,' said Angie. 'Instead of talc. The bottle's gone with Fingerprints. Might get something off it.'

'Was there any semen?' Gemma asked.

'Can't say until we get the analysts' report back.' Angie turned to the young detective who'd just walked in, elegant in an expensive suit. 'You can pack this up now, Bruno,' she said. 'We got all the shots we want.' Bruno stared at Gemma and seemed about to say something, but instead turned his back and started working. Gemma looked at the back of his head, the line of his hair along the back of his neck. She remembered times when she'd undone that very tie he was wearing, undone the buttons of his shirt, unbuckled his belt, said things like 'Put that weapon here on the bed where I can see it, officer.' Remembered his mouth hot on her neck and breasts and her hands digging into the warm skin of his back and shoulders that were now turned

away from her. She brought her attention back to Angie. 'Who is she?'

'She's sixteen-year-old Bianca Perrault. Her younger sister, Amy, was staying over at a girlfriend's house. Mrs Perrault was asleep in bed and Mr Perrault is away on business. We're trying to get hold of him.' Angie looked around the room again. 'I think,' she said, 'that the MO is different this time because he doesn't need to make a woman. He's taken a real one instead.'

Gemma looked at her friend then turned the camera on again, slowly panning the collection of family snapshots on top of a white-painted chest of drawers. In one of them the two sisters, dressed in the short pleated skirts of a netball team, looked out laughing at the photographer. 'That's right,' she said, picking up Angie's line of thought, herself thinking out loud. 'He's got himself a real one. And there're no stab marks, either,' she added as she videoed the carpet, looked up and met her friend's eyes again. The stab marks will come later, Gemma thought, wherever he's taken her. Her blood chilled at the thought and she put her camera down because her hands were shaking.

The two women walked out of the bedroom and into the large living area where a blue vase of jonquils filled the air with their delicate scent. From outside came the sudden unexpected burst of laughter that Gemma remembered from the old days. Some black joke, she thought, to make the unbearable bearable. She was perversely pleased to get this call-out. It was like the old days and it felt familiar. It also took her mind off the rift between herself and Steve, the stand-off between herself and Kit. My life is so bloody *uncomfortable*, she thought, and then felt immediately guilty, thinking of the accounts clerk dead on the floor of her Maroubra flat and the terror of a young

girl, stolen in the night from her own bedroom by a madman.

'How do you read it?' she asked, looking around. There were grilles on the windows and she'd noticed the security doors back and front when she'd followed Angie inside and through the house.

Angie flicked through her notebook. 'He came in the back door to the kitchen,' she said. 'The lock had been forced. We think he forced her to go with him back out through the door. You can see there's been a struggle in the bedroom. But he's overpowered her and silenced her. Possibly at knife point.'

'He's got to have had a vehicle,' Gemma said. 'Someone must have seen something, heard something.'

'Mrs Perrault had taken a sleeping pill,' Angie said. 'She didn't see or hear anything until the phone rang this morning and she saw Bianca's empty bed and the back door open.'

'What about the security grille?' Gemma asked.

'Mrs Perrault says she thinks it wasn't locked,' said Angie. 'Just closed.'

Gemma thought of all the times she'd locked her front door but only pushed the grille door shut. Letting the hell beings slip in, Kit would have said. 'She'll be feeling good about that,' Gemma said.

'She's heavily sedated, at her sister's place,' Angie said. 'We've got to get this bastard. He's taken this girl right from under her family's nose.'

Gemma thought of him going through his sick gig, just a metre or so away from where she lay sleeping. 'He likes that,' she heard herself say. 'He likes the risk. That's part of it for him.' She knew that from her own experience, the dens of iniquity, the nameless men and searing sex without words. But in this man's case, it wasn't the thrill of anonymous

sex he was seeking, but the ultimate and lethal power over another human being.

'We're taking statements from everybody who knows Bianca and her family,' said Angie. 'And I mean everyone. Then we're getting a Scan analyst to check them all out for any hint of anything.'

'Scan?' said Gemma, remembering the conversation she'd had with Steve. The sadness welled up again and she turned her full attention back to Angie.

'It's a powerful investigative tool,' said her friend, 'a way of detecting deception and concealment in statements by way of detailed analysis of the words used.'

The two women walked out of the house, leaving the other Crime Scene personnel behind them, walking down the front garden to the driveway gate, past the wheelie bin, heading towards their respective vehicles. The sun had risen and it was a beautiful morning filled with clear early light. The Channel Ten van was still parked across the road and Mick was talking to the heavy-set man Gemma had noticed earlier, who was now standing near the driveway entrance to the Perrault house.

'This is a crime scene, sir,' Mick was saying, jerking his notebook towards the house. 'And I must ask you to leave or you could be arrested for impeding the police in the course of their duties.' The bulky man mumbled something and turned away to walk back across the road and past the Channel Ten van. 'Cheeky bugger,' Mick said to the two women as they watched. 'He was trying to go inside.' A small crowd had gathered beyond the cordoned area and were watching the house and the vehicles parked around it. 'You'd think they had better things to do at this hour of the day.'

'Wish we did,' said Gemma, as they crossed the road. 'Steve's going to give the statement my father wrote on the

night of my mother's death to a Scan expert.' She wondered now if he would.

'I didn't know you had the statement.' Angie asked. 'Why are you doing it now, after all this time?'

'I'm hoping to reopen my father's case. I want to show the crime scene pictures to that American bloodstain expert.'

'I see,' said Angie, understanding her friend. Then she came back to business. 'That street worker you rang me about,' she said. 'Can you chase her up for me?'

'I'm not sure she'd talk to you,' said Gemma.

'She'll have to, this is getting big,' Angie said, indicating the house behind them and the gathering crowd and a TV journalist looking sincerely into the camera while he did his on-the-spot number for the viewers. 'The boss has a lot riding on me.' She looked around to make sure no one was eavesdropping. 'And Bruno is being his usual charming self. He's one of those guys who thinks his dick's going to drop off if he says "Yes" to a woman. Tanya told me he's been bad-mouthing me. He's determined to be as difficult as possible.'

They'd reached Gemma's car. 'When I got my promotion last year, know what he said?'

Gemma nodded. 'Yes,' she said. '"Whose cock did you suck to get that?"'

'How did you know?'

'I got it, too.'

'He's getting worse,' Angie said.

'Men like that always get worse.' Gemma unlocked her car and climbed in.

'Now that Bianca's missing,' Angie said, 'that street girl is going to have to come in. See if you can talk her into doing a session with Devlin. She might be less nervous if you ask.'

Gemma remembered Bill Devlin, the forensic hypnotist,

and the sometimes extraordinary details he'd been able to elicit from witnesses and victims of major crime. 'Okay,' she said doubtfully, extracting her keys from her wallet. 'I'll try.'

'And I want you to come in with your video to the Strike Force meeting,' Angie said. 'Because it looks like you were his first victim.'

'That we know about,' said Gemma.

'Oh,' Angie said. 'That rego check you asked me to do on the green Ford. The vehicle came up as stolen ten days ago according to Marrickville police. Owned by a woman kindergarten teacher.' Angie started her car. 'Now,' she said over the sound of the engine, 'you can do something for me.' Gemma raised an eyebrow.

'Now that everything has to be done by the fucking book standing on your head in triplicate,' said Angie, 'I'd feel a lot happier if I knew I had a girlfriend on the outside who's not tied up like we are. Someone who can move around freely. Ask questions. Keep an eye on things. Let me know stuff. And quickly. Like you've already been doing.'

'Fast and free,' Gemma said. 'That's me.' She started her car. Angie waved her friend goodbye and Gemma drove away. She stopped at a still-closed bakery and patisserie at Bondi and sat in the car for ten minutes until it was seven o'clock, in order to pick up some croissants for breakfast.

On the way home, she found herself once again cruising Steve's street, her eyes darting, trying to cover everything and the road ahead as well. She braked suddenly, causing the car behind her to screech to a halt and lean on his horn. She waited while the angry driver behind her accelerated and took off past her, giving her the finger as he did.

Outside Steve's block of flats stood four wheelie bins, waiting for the council garbage pick-up. Gemma squashed

the paper bag of croissants into the glovebox, parked, jumped out of her car, dragged Steve's bin over and opened the back door of her car. She started throwing the bags of rubbish from Steve's bin into the back seat. She had done this so often on other jobs that it hardly seemed odd any more, but she was aware of people's stares. The stink of rubbish filled her car as she took off for home.

Back at her place, she squashed Steve's rubbish into her own bin and dragged it to the door of her apartment. The Ratbag looked up from where he'd been squatting on the grass next to a cardboard carton. 'Why are you taking rubbish *in* to your house?' he wanted to know.

'Because,' she said.

'Because why?'

'Because Y is a crooked letter and you can't make it straight.' And she dragged the bin over her doorstep, hearing the ghost of her Aunt Merle's voice in the words as she closed the front door. She left the rubbish bin in the hall and, after she'd washed her hands, put the coffee on and went back outside to get the croissants. The Ratbag was hunched over the carton and he didn't look up as she went up to the car. She remembered that his mother left very early in the morning. On the way down, she felt suddenly sorry she'd fobbed him off with the smart-arsed 'Y is a crooked letter' response.

'What you got there?' she asked, coming up behind him.

'It's a nankeen kestrel,' he said. 'I found him in the cemetery. One of his wings is hurt. I wanted to take him to the vet but Mum wouldn't go. She said wild things just die anyway.' He opened the lid and Gemma peered in to see the kestrel huddling in a corner, its fierce brown eye glaring from its moth-coloured plumage. It flapped awkwardly and the Ratbag put the lid back on the box.

'What are you feeding it on?' Gemma asked.

'Mice,' he said. 'I buy pinkies from the pet shop.' Gemma looked at him. 'It's all right,' he said. 'I kill them first.'

'That's nice,' said Gemma.

'They're only mice,' the Ratbag said reasonably. 'And he doesn't actually eat them anyway. He hasn't eaten anything.' He looked up at her. 'Do you think he'll die?'

'Maybe you should let him out,' she said.

'But your cat!' the Ratbag cried, and there was real anguish in his voice. 'Your cat would kill him.'

'You could make a safe place for him,' she said, 'where Taxi couldn't get at him. Like a cage or something.' He looked up at her. 'I have to go,' she said. 'I've got coffee on the stove.'

She took the coffee out onto the deck, carrying with her the contents of Philip Hawker's manila envelope. The sea was a mirror of blinding light and she had to turn away from the glare, spreading out the contents of the envelope. There were two small notebooks, pages of court transcripts and several pieces of folded paper which Gemma put aside for the moment. She briefly glanced through the court pages, noting Philip Hawker's name. She paused at the evidence of a Detective Sergeant Frank Alan O'Donell from the CIB Scientific Section. 'All the blood was deposited at the time of the attack', the typed words declared. 'All the blood', Gemma was thinking. My mother's blood. Deposited. That special police language that tones down the horror of moments of violence.

The photographs were hard to look at. She turned the close-up shots of her mother face-down and concentrated on the shots of her father's clothes and the surroundings of her childhood home. Black spurts of blood stained the

jacket in the picture and the walls of the dining room. She remembered Philip Hawker saying the pattern of the bloodstaining was consistent with impact splatter, and this could only have happened at the time of the attack as major blood vessels opened. In one picture, someone's hands held the jacket up against the wall, like the missing piece of a jigsaw puzzle, to show that the black spatter on the wall was a continuation of a large stain on the right sleeve of the jacket. But was it? Gemma looked closely. It certainly looked as if the blood on the clothing and the blood on the wall were part of the same spread. This was the sort of evidence, she considered, that only expert eyes could judge. As they had. Thirty years ago.

The blood on the walls and the blood on the jacket curved in large, sweeping patterns, vaguely reminiscent of palm leaves, with one strong splash running diagonally up the wall like the main stem and the other smaller splashes branching down like the individual leaves. Gemma stared at the patterns. She tidied the photos, edge to edge, put them back in their envelope with the notebooks and the transcript pages and sat immobile, shocked at how deeply they'd affected her. She felt tears well up. She tidied everything back into the manila envelope and placed it near the front door. She turned her attention deliberately to Steve's rubbish. As she started on one of the standard operating procedures of her business – checking someone's rubbish – she remembered a conversation she'd had with Kit some time ago. You can learn a lot about a person, Kit had told her, from the way they live, the environment they've created around them. 'People's decor becomes diagnostic,' she'd said, and Gemma had been taken with the phrase. She recalled the derelict homes she'd been into during her time with the cops, the filth and rubbish of some people's

houses reflecting the filth and rubbish of their messy minds creating chaos around themselves. But you can learn as much, if not more, she was thinking, from what they throw away. What magazines or papers the targets read, what they eat, whether they cook themselves or use take-away, how much they waste, what sort of condiments they like, what sort of food they prefer, who's written to them, and often the letters as well. Phone numbers on scraps of paper, whether they've used condoms. You can even find out what some of their activities are in advance, especially if they're list-makers.

The rubbish bin from outside Steve's place, like most people's, was like an archeological dig: today and yesterday on top, and moving backwards through the week until last week lay squashed at the bottom. And from the top until almost the bottom, there was no hint of Steve. Not only that, there were items that indicated someone else had moved in and had been living there for the last five days. That would make sense, Gemma realised. Steve would have to vanish the minute the drug squad had made their bust of his erstwhile bikie buddies.

It quickly became clear that the new tenant living in the flat was a woman who smoked Winfield Lights, drank tinned vodka and orange, used panty-liners, lived on Lean Cuisine and fruit and ate a lot of potato chips. But right at the bottom of the bin was a shopping list in Steve's handwriting, as well as wrappers from the honey and lemon sweets he'd started continually sucking once he'd given up smoking.

Gemma seized the list. 'G's present', she read. She thought of the little package that had hit the floor during that last scene with him. She still hadn't dared look for it, far less open it, knowing it would break her heart. This is pathetic, she told herself as she smoothed out the stained piece of paper. It's bad enough when I'm charging forty dollars an

hour to root around in rubbish. But here I am, doing it for free. She turned her attention back to the scrap of paper with Steve's writing on it; there were two more words: 'Bike, Keys' followed by a phone number. Gemma put it to one side, rebundled the rubbish back in the bin and wheeled it back up to the roadside. There was no sign of the Ratbag, who must have gone to school. When she came inside she lit some scented rose-shaped candles – a gift from last Christmas – and placed all five of them in different parts of the house. The stink of old garbage started to fade and she walked back out onto the timber deck with the scrap of paper in her hand. She felt ashamed of spying on Steve but, despite herself, she studied the little shopping list. Did 'Bike' mean to take the bike back to the police centre? And the keys to it? Or could it mean to pick up the keys for a new safe house? Still, her search had yielded a phone number, and that was something. But before she could act on it, Angie was on the phone, asking her to come in at once.

She drove straight over. *'Next time I'll be true, I'll be true,'* sang the radio and she had to turn it off because her eyes were filling with tears. At the police centre, Angie came downstairs to meet her and they went up in the lift and out into the corridor. 'We're set up down the hallway,' she said, indicating a room further down the hall. 'Do you want tea or coffee before we join them?'

Gemma followed her into the meal room, where Angie poured boiling water onto the instant coffee spooned into styrofoam cups. 'The press is going apeshit over this case. You're not supposed to have this sort of thing happening in the eastern suburbs. It's why we pay such high rates,' she said. 'Not too much violent crime and the nor'easter. The Commissioner's just been up here talking to the boss and

to us – as much overtime as we need.' She looked pleased and Gemma stole a biscuit from a packet left on the table, remembering that the croissants she'd bought earlier were still in their paper bag lying near the sink and realising that by now Taxi had probably chewed them. Angie was peering into the fridge, looking for milk. 'Kings Cross cops are trying to find that sex worker who spoke with you. Devlin wants to try getting something on the FACE program with her.'

A young detective put his head round the door. 'Come on, Angie, we're waiting on you. Boss says get your cute arse down here now.'

'Don't cute arse me, Col,' said Angie, 'or I'll put you on paper for sexual harassment.'

'Only joking,' said Colin. 'You haven't got a cute arse at all.' He ducked too late and the biscuit Angie had thrown at him ricocheted off his forehead and onto the floor. Gemma felt a stab of something that wasn't quite nostalgia or jealousy.

The psychiatrist was holding the floor when Angie and Gemma slipped into the room and into two chairs together at the end of a long table covered with styrofoam cups and notebooks. Copies of photographs of the crime scene at Maroubra and the bedroom at South Coogee were doing the rounds.

'There's every indication that he knows his area very well,' Dr Garry Copeland was saying. 'Might even live close by. We're working on the assumption that he'd been watching the house. It wouldn't have been hard to work out that Mr Perrault was away. It's possible he might even have known the girl.'

Not necessarily, Gemma thought. It is so easy to collect the most intimate knowledge about perfect strangers. She thought of days, weeks, months even, of sitting watching a

house, noticing who came in and who went out. Noticing which car was missing from the garage, or not being used, day after day. Watching the routine of the day right up to the hour the light in the bedroom is finally turned out and the house is in darkness. But that doesn't mean that things can't be seen. As long as there is someone outside watching and listening, the household is exposed.

As Garry droned on, listing the facts about the murdered accounts clerk from Maroubra, and the missing girl from South Coogee, Gemma's mind continued imagining the killer. Perhaps there'd been other women who'd woken to find their clothes all stabbed on the floor who had stayed silent.

'See,' said Garry, scratching his balding head in a way Gemma remembered well, 'what we're primarily looking for when we build up these victim profiles is *motive*. That's why we want to know all sorts of things about these two young women. Particularly their personal habits, any friends and enemies and any recent changes in lifestyle. Motive is what we're after. But these sorts of cases often don't have what we'd usually call a motive. That's when profiling can be helpful. But keep in mind,' Garry added, looking around sternly, 'that the use of profiling does not replace sound investigation procedures.'

Oh God, Garry, Gemma thought, you are so *boring*. Her mind was racing ahead of him, working through what she knew already about the clothes killer. He'd been opportunistic, noticing a door left slightly open. He'd come into her life through a crack of her own making. She'd have to admit that now. This had excited him, he'd come in closer to investigate. Maybe he had been a 'virgin' until then, Gemma thought, and this was the first time he'd gone 'out' to find a target. Maybe until then, he'd snow-dropped

women's clothes and wanked over them. She picked out the photographs of the two crime scenes and laid them down, side by side. Too different, said the analysing part of her mind. But some things are similar, said the rationalising part. One idea in particular suggested itself to her, but she wanted to talk to Kit about it and get more depth and clarity before voicing it.

Angie swung round on her seat and pressed the Play button on the video recorder behind her, and the Maroubra crime scene came to slow life again as the camera panned over the murdered woman and her clothes. The group watched the sequence in silence until the screen hissed black and white. Then Angie placed the brand new video from that morning's abduction into the video player. Again, the methodical, slow video, without characters, without action. Just the mise en scène of violence. Angie followed this with another tape, and Gemma's breath caught in her throat as she recognised the grainy copy of her tape from the Tusculum Hotel. She leaned back in her seat, not wanting to watch this again, but the silent, slow-moving screen drew her and she sat, mesmerised, as the camera panned across her shredded clothes, the slashed carpet.

'You were a lucky girl, not to wake up while he was there,' said Garry Copeland, nodding and smiling and getting on Gemma's wick, as if he himself had somehow saved her from the killer because of his brilliant, deductive mind. 'So. You've all seen what the Crime Scene examiners saw. And what Gemma videoed. And now I want to run through the main points of the violent offenders' profile with you.' Garry's balding head jerked with enthusiasm.

Gemma inclined towards Angie. 'I'm off,' she whispered. 'Call me if you need me.' Gemma stood up, clutching the manila envelope, and walked out the door. Angie followed

her. 'Thanks for coming in,' she said. 'I appreciate it. What did you think of Copeland and his psych talk?'

'He's okay as far as he goes,' said Gemma. 'But there's something bothering me, and I'm not sure yet what it is.'

'About the abduction?'

'About the whole business,' said Gemma. 'About the three crime scenes. Something doesn't fit.'

'Tell me what you're thinking.' Angie's keen, polished face turned and her eyes narrowed with interest.

'I will,' Gemma promised. 'When I'm surer of what it is.'

Gemma drove to Silverwater, parked the car in the visitors' section and was waiting when the radio came to staticky life.

'Tracker Three calling; copy please, base.'

Gemma snatched up the two-way. 'Go ahead, Spinner.'

'I'm at Rose Georgiou's place,' he said.

'"Rose", is it? You were quick. Getting there, I mean.'

'I'm going to put the camera in the light fitting right over the bed. Sound and movement activated. Then all we need are the principal actors to show up.'

'My instincts tell me they'll arrive as soon as Mrs Georgiou goes to her mum's for the weekend. You should be in movies, Spinner.'

'I am,' he said. 'Director, producer and camera man.'

'Is Mrs Georgiou there?'

'She's making me a cup of coffee.'

'Noel got an offer the other day. To make a revenge video. Don't be tempted,' she teased.

'"Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord",' Spinner quoted back at her and Gemma found she was smiling as she signed off, fitting the radio back in its housing, then she looked up and saw her father walking towards her. He was carrying a

small overnight bag and a rolled-up newspaper. Gemma was reminded of a workman going home for dinner. Her heart beat hard in her chest and her mouth went dry. She got out of the car and walked round to the passenger side to open the door for him, to give herself something to do.

'Hullo,' she said, straightening up.

Her father didn't answer for a second. Then he put his bag down and opened his hands in a helpless gesture. 'May I hug you?' he asked.

'I don't know,' she said, feeling foolish.

He looked at her intently, picked up his bag again, and climbed into the car. 'You've answered me,' he said. 'Maybe later on.' Gemma climbed in and started the car.

'Thank you for picking me up,' he said. 'It's kind of you.' On the phone he'd told her about the flat in Glebe he'd organised to stay at after his release, with the man who'd been his cellmate the last few years and was released earlier in the year, a solicitor who'd overreached himself and used money from a trust fund. Gemma drove towards the city. It was an overcast day with a glaring sky. She switched the radio on, finding something that she thought her father might like.

'It's hard to believe,' he said, 'that I'm never going back there again. That I don't have to be back tomorrow night. That I'll be sharing a flat with Paul like any other single man of sixty-seven.'

'What will you do with yourself?' she asked.

'I've still got some money,' he said. 'And with the pension I should manage all right. Paul said he could find me the occasional search to do or some research work.' He paused. 'I'm going to write a book,' he said. 'Two books, actually. I'm determined that the world will see that what I said was true.'

'That's one book,' she said.

'And I've been working on something else of a medical nature. But I need to research it more.' He looked over at her, smiling in a way that revealed his large, white teeth.

The expression on his face catapulted her back thirty years and she suddenly remembered him speaking at the university to a hall full of important doctors. Her mother, thin and nervous in a fur coat, had clutched Gemma's hand too tight as the lecture hall filled with gentlemen, young and ancient, wearing brilliant robes with hoods and fur trim. Her heart had been bursting with pride and love because this was her father that all these important people had come to hear. But then she remembered shivering in the big square wicker clothes basket, huddled up to Kit, hearing his voice screaming at their mother. This time, she was able to remember the outline of the fight. 'All you have to do is keep your bloody children quiet. That's all I expect of you. No cooking, no housework, nothing like that because all of that is beyond you. But just keep them quiet! And you can't even do that!' and the door of his forbidden study slamming and the sobbing of their mother.

'Where was it,' she said, keeping her voice steady, 'that you were giving some talk or other, and there were men in academic robes?'

Her father looked out the window. 'Oh, I did a few of those,' he said. 'Various universities. I was the leading light there for a while.' And now the leading light and terrifying door-slammer was a frail old-age pensioner with thin silver hair and skin and eyes that were very like hers. Gemma's own brimmed with tears. 'That was a long time ago,' he said. 'I'm surprised you can remember it.'

'Kit remembers a lot more,' said Gemma, then wished she hadn't.

'Ah, Kit,' he said. 'She was always on the look-out.'

'For what?' said Gemma, surprising herself.

Her father shrugged. 'The first born is always more tuned in to what's going on. More alert. I did a very good paper once on the effects of birth order in families.'

'I'd like to see that one day,' said Gemma. 'And I'm sure Kit would, too.'

Suddenly he swung round on her. 'Does she still think I did it?'

There was a shocked silence and then Gemma nodded. 'Yes, I'm afraid she does.'

'So how does she feel about you seeing me again?'

'She's not very happy about it. But she accepts that I have my own way of doing things.'

'She followed in my footsteps,' he said. 'She's a therapist.' Gemma could hear the pride in his voice and she felt a twinge of jealousy. 'Is she any good? Does she get good results with her clients?'

'You'd have to ask her that. She doesn't work like you did,' said Gemma. 'She's a bioenergetic therapist.'

'Bioenergetics.' He made a dismissive sound. 'Psychiatrists have always been able to make a lot of money out of hysterical women. I suppose she knows that mad old Reich died disgraced in prison. Him and his orgone box.'

'Who?' said Gemma.

'Never mind,' he said. 'The important thing is whether you believe I did it or not.'

They had never talked like this before. Now, driving along in the car with the day going on around them, the traffic, the people on the streets, the ordinariness of daily life, such intimacy seemed perfectly acceptable. It was

almost as if now he was out, everything else had to come out, too.

'No,' she said. 'I don't believe you did.'

She felt him relax beside her and lean back in the seat. 'All the evidence was circumstantial,' he said. 'They never explained that footprint. It wasn't mine. There was no way anyone could have said that I did it except for the bloodstain pattern interpretation. And that was always going to be controversial. The defence expert said that the blood on my jacket was consistent with what I said – that your mother coughed on me as she was being lifted onto the stretcher. There was always argument about the time of the attack. Naturally the prosecution put it at the time I got home. The defence and I knew it was earlier.'

Gemma found herself picturing this, the bleeding woman on the stretcher, her father helping lift her mother from the dining room floor and then onto the stretcher and into the back of the ambulance, the terrible facial injuries from the black and white crime scene photographs in her mind now brilliant with blood.

'These days,' she said, 'more and more cases are hanging on expert versus expert. I'm going to show the crime scene photographs to a visiting bloodstain expert.'

Her father looked at her, very interested. 'Name of?' he asked.

'Dr Zelda Firestone.'

Her father shook his head. 'I should know her name,' he said, 'but I don't.' He paused and Gemma noticed his head fall forward onto his chest a moment, as if he were praying or thinking deeply. 'For a long time,' he said after a while, 'I did everything I could to get my case reopened. I did a lot of work on the action of blood and bloodstain interpretation. People forget that psychiatrists have a medical degree first.

But time after time I was knocked back on appeal. That, and the life of a convict—' His voice faltered. '—eventually wore me down. I just gave up.' Then he swung around on her and Gemma glanced quickly at him and back at the road but not before noticing that he was furious. 'I should never have been convicted!' he said. 'Things happened *exactly* as I told them at the time. That is the truth.'

'I'm going to do everything in my power,' she said, 'to get your case reopened.'

Her father seized her hand on the steering wheel, squeezed it, and let it go. 'My daughter,' he said, 'my little Gemfish.' He seemed overcome for a few moments and Gemma's eyes blurred with tears. She swallowed hard.

At the lights, her father looked around at the shops and pedestrians. 'So busy,' he said. 'This area used to be almost rural.' He noticed a bottleshop across the road with an advertisement for specials on Hahndorf wines. 'Ha!' he snorted. 'Still a touch of the barnyard. I wonder if they'd sell as much of that wine if the buyers knew it translates as Cock Town Wines!' This only amused him for a moment and he fell back into a brooding silence.

'My story has never changed,' he said finally. 'I did not touch your mother that night except when I picked her up and helped the ambulance officers.' Gemma changed lanes ready to turn onto the motorway. Her father had turned away and was staring out his window. He remained silent for the rest of the trip, brooding in some place of his own.

Gemma briefly came in with her father to his new Glebe address, a small flat at the back of a grand old terrace that opened out onto a dark, overgrown garden. There were two bedrooms, a lounge and a large kitchen that opened out with lead-light windows onto a quarry-tiled patio before the jungle of oleanders, palms and hibiscus that barely flowered because

of the lack of light. The flat itself had a subterranean feel to it and the eastern walls were sandstone, cut out of the living rock. He seemed pleased to make her a cup of coffee and show her around.

'I feel very much at home now. I've been staying here,' he told her, 'on weekend release. Paul is a nice fellow. You'll like him. I've told him all about my clever private investigator daughter.' In his room, he already had a desk and small computer set up under the window next to his single bed. 'I want to get all my papers and records out of storage,' he said. 'Do you know anyone with a van who'd like to earn some extra money?'

'Noel,' she said. 'One of my operators. He's always wanting more work. And he's got a big van.' She gave her father Noel's number and he pocketed it. She wanted to ask him about Rowena Wylde, but decided to leave that until a later date. She wanted to check the woman out herself first. She agreed to come over for dinner on a night to be arranged next week, said goodbye and drove home. When she arrived, the phone was ringing and she ran to pick it up. It was her father.

'You don't know what it means,' he said, 'to know you believe me. I want my name cleared. And it's not just that. I want compensation for the thirty years I spent in the hell of the New South Wales prison system. I want a fortune in compensation. I want a lot of money – not for me any more, I'm getting on. But so that I can leave it to my daughters. So that—' Gemma heard his voice break, '—so that I can at last be some sort of father to my girls.'

Gemma felt tears coming to her eyes and she quickly blinked them away by thinking like a cop. 'Someone bludgeoned my mother to death,' she said. There was

a long silence at the other end of the line. 'And the problem for me,' Gemma paused, 'is that he's still out there.'

THIRTEEN

Gemma fiddled with the manila envelope while she rang the number Dr Zelda Firestone had given her. 'I'm staying at a serviced suite in Liverpool Street,' the American told her and gave her the address. 'I would not be available to look at the crime scene photographs until an evening later in the week. What about Thursday evening? Seven?'

'We've waited thirty years,' said Gemma. 'Thursday evening at seven will be fine.' She rang off and picked up the remains of the croissants. They were in several pieces, duly chewed and spread over the kitchen floor. Pastry wasn't Taxi's favourite food, but he always liked to test anything he found just to make sure. She called out to him and was surprised that he didn't come running. Outside, the nor'easter buffeted her umbrella and she went out onto the deck to fold it down. Once, it had gone flying like a crazy javelin to impale itself on a patch of ground near the brush that led down to the ocean. She called Taxi again, but no ginger shape came waddling across the grass towards her. The sea was now battleship grey under a pale apple green sky with the haze on the horizon foretelling a change.

She switched on the television to watch the news. The abduction of Bianca Perrault was the lead story and there was footage showing the police activity around the Perrault

house. 'Women should make sure doors and windows are secure,' said Davey, now a Superintendent, squinting because he was short-sighted, Gemma remembered, but too vain to wear glasses.

She suddenly felt starving. In the cupboard, she found a tin of sardines and an old lemon and made herself sardines on toast. She was finishing up the last piece, walking into the lounge area with the plate under her chin to catch the crumbs, when the crumpled twist of a terrible car crash on the television caused her to stop in her tracks. 'Police have released the name of the driver, killed instantly when her car careered out of control and collided with an oncoming semi-trailer. She was sixty-four-year-old Imelda Moresby.' Gemma froze, mid-chew. She didn't hear the rest of the news item. She remembered the dead woman's strange words about everything going in twos. She recalled the words about the stirring of evil, and Kit's warnings about old energies being aroused.

A sickening sense of responsibility assailed her. Did I do this? she asked herself. Did I bring this violent car crash on by reopening some archive from the past and letting some psychic genie out of a bottle? Don't be so silly, she told herself sternly. I'm sounding like some flakey New Ager. But she was shaken, and the fact that Taxi still wasn't home frightened her. She looked around, expecting to see him waiting there, licking his chops. 'Where *are* you?' she said out loud, irritated by his absence.

'We are karmically linked,' Mrs Moresby had said, or something like that. So it was with more dread that she fetched the photographs again and briefly flipped through the notebooks, sitting at the table. The pages were filled with notes of interviews, dates of birth, addresses, phone numbers, memory aids in the man's neat, square writing.

Her eyes stopped at the name Dr Rowena Wylde, as well as her address and phone number. Underneath were other names and addresses. Names from thirty years ago. And Mrs Moresby was dead. She rang Kit and left a message to say she'd be over later.

When Clive came into Kit's therapy room, he sat right down on the mattresses without any comment. He was more relaxed than he'd been before, Kit thought. More comfortable about being grounded and on eye level with her. Perhaps he was starting to trust her, to feel that she had no axe to grind with him, no agenda that he had to conform with.

'I've found a new friend,' he announced. Kit cocked her head as if to say 'is that so', indicating she'd like to hear more.

'Yes,' said Clive. 'A young bloke. We had an outing together.'

Kit waited, so he went on. 'That probably doesn't sound much to you. But ever since the wife left, and since this *problem* developed, I haven't felt like going anywhere much at all, especially with another man. It mightn't sound much to you, but it was a big thing for me. We went for a drive to the Blue Mountains. He has an auntie living there.'

'And how have you been during the last week?' Kit asked. She noticed a gleam of malice mixed with mischief in the narrowed eyes as he spoke.

'I had a dream,' he said. 'I dreamed I had sex with you. Right here, on this mattress.' He patted it and peered at her again, like a child peeking out from behind curtains, Kit thought. 'I had a big erection and I just climbed on top of you and that was it.'

'Did that put me in my place?' Kit asked him. Clive put his head to one side and regarded her. Kit continued, 'Because if

you could just climb on top of a woman with a big erection, I would be redundant. You wouldn't need to come to therapy any more, would you?'

Clive considered. 'I can't remember,' he said. 'Because I can't remember the ending of it.'

'It's not uncommon for clients to have sexual feelings for me,' said Kit mildly. 'Sex doesn't happen here, though,' she added. 'In other so-called therapies, sex sometimes occurs. But you can relax in the knowledge that it doesn't happen here in this room with me or anywhere else with me.'

Clive shook his head. 'I thought it would be good for me,' he said slyly. 'I heard that body work can cure impotence. Wouldn't it be a natural part of the therapy?'

'Sex will be good for you when you've dealt with some of the issues that brought you here. When you've discovered what makes you impotent in your own life. That's what you're here for. To bring more life to your deadened body. Once you've regained your potent energy, sex will take its proper place in your life.' She moved to be at his feet. 'I'm going to do some work on your feet if you're agreeable.'

Clive nodded and she started rubbing her thumbs along the sole of his foot. 'It's a good dream,' she said as she massaged. 'About finding your hardness – a sexually functioning penis – in therapy. You're on the right track. And I think, too, there is an aspect of overpowering the woman in the dream. About a power struggle in this room. You have probably seen sex in terms of power?'

He nodded. 'Of course,' he said, as if it was obvious. 'What else is it about?'

Half an hour later, they were talking about Clive's mother.

'Tell her,' said Kit, 'tell her what you'd like to say to her.'

Clive's face was red. 'I'm disappointed and angry that my mother is dead,' said Clive, grunting with the effort.

'Why is that?' Kit asked.

'Because I can't murder her now.' After a minute or two, he rolled over and sat up, facing her. 'I wonder if they'll ever find that young girl,' he said. 'The one that was taken from her house? Or if they'll only find her body?'

Kit sat back on her heels. Was this a metaphoric statement, she wondered, about him discovering his own body again, which had been 'taken' from his house so long ago, was it merely news of the day chit-chat, or was it something more sinister? It was, she recalled, the second time he'd made reference to this series of killings.

FOURTEEN

'It's weird,' said Gemma, straining to look over Kit's back fence, 'how we both feel we're being watched. Or followed.' She jumped down from her precarious toehold on the brick footing and brushed her hands together, ridding them of crushed vine leaves. 'Don't you think?'

Kit nodded. 'What were you looking at?'

'Nothing in particular,' said her sister. 'Mind you,' she added, 'in my game being followed is probably more to do with my line of work.'

'I think I can say the same,' said Kit. 'I see some pretty disturbed people. Especially in the early days of their therapy when they're looking at things they've pushed away for a lifetime. Things seem to get a lot worse before they get better.'

'Do you think the intruder was one of your clients?'

Kit shrugged. 'I simply can't say,' she said finally. 'It's certainly possible.' She squatted down next to an overgrown garden bed and started attacking the couch grass that had all but covered the ground under some struggling daphne and gardenia bushes. Gemma watched as a long strand of couch came unstitched until Kit pulled it right out and threw it on the pile. She'd told her sister about Mrs Moresby's death.

'About this case of the effigy killer that I seem to be getting more and more involved with,' Gemma started.

Her sister looked up from her weeding. 'You look tired, Gems.'

'Yes,' she said. 'I am. I've got a lot going on at the moment. Did I tell you I took our father to his new digs in Glebe?' she said. 'He's got a nice garden flat there.'

'Bully for him,' said Kit, tugging at a long string of grass. 'You've got enough on your plate without running round after him.'

'Oh Kit, please,' said Gemma, stung. 'He wants to clear his name. He wants a huge compensation payment. So he can be a father to us at last. He said he wanted to be of some use to us and leave us a lot of money. He's changed, Kit. He's not the violent, frightening man that we knew as kids. He's paid a terrible price for his character defects.'

'If he's innocent,' said Kit. There was a tense silence.

'Anyway,' said Gemma, after a pause, 'I'm not here to argue about that. I want to talk over some aspects of Angie's investigation with you. This time, he's abducted a young girl from her home.'

'How do you know it's him?' said Kit.

'We don't. Not for sure. But he'd made a pile of women's clothes, not laid out like the last times. Just in a pile.'

'Maybe he doesn't need to "make" a woman,' said Kit. 'Now that he's taken a real one.'

'That's what Angie thought, but maybe it's not him at all,' said Gemma. 'It's certainly different from the other situations. I'd like to have your comments.'

'Tell me the whole story,' said Kit. 'Right from the very beginning.' So Gemma did, weeding beside her sister, talking through the crime scenes, starting with her own shocking discovery at the Tusculum Hotel, the clothes on the floor,

the door left ajar, moving onto the young accounts clerk murdered at Maroubra because she made the mistake of sleeping with a window slightly open, the golf club lying beside her stiffening fingers. Then the crime scene at South Coogee, the empty bed and the stolen girl, the forced lock, the clothes in a messy pile on the floor, the pearl necklace dropped on top. Kit listened, with full attention, occasionally interrupting to get clear about a point. She consciously put away the disagreement about their father so that they could join again, in their usual way, to sort something out, as they had so many times before. She took up the broom, seemingly deep in thought, sweeping the pulled-up grass into a pile.

'I have to ask myself something about this person,' she said eventually. 'Why he does the things he does. What he reveals about himself by what he does.' She squatted back on her heels, facing her sister. 'There's a boy – a young man – probably in his twenties. He's demonstrated that he's completely inadequate with women. That's why he has to sneak in on them. He is probably quite inadequate in his own life, as well. He's unmothered, unfathered. His schooling has reflected this. He's not a success story in any part of his life. He's one of those unnoticed people, but he's worse off than that. He's what some would refer to as a "loser". So his life and his appearance will reflect that. I imagine squalor around him. Ill-kempt appearance, the look of neglect. What you're looking for is someone who is a spiritual and psychological derelict in their own life, as well as physically squalid. Maybe bad teeth, run-down shoes, poorly dressed. Dirty house. I'd be surprised if he has a job, especially in these days of high unemployment. Or if he does work, it might be at an abattoir, or in animal husbandry – somewhere he can indulge his rage and sadism on weaker creatures. Because he's very passive. Timid, even. He does things with women's clothes. Maybe

he peeps too. Maybe he fantasises about how good it would be to do his clothes thing with a woman nearby, but not too near. The first time his fantasy comes true – that we know about – is when your door at the motel is left ajar. There's an opportunity and he takes it, slipping into a woman's room, a woman's life. A sleeping woman's life.'

Gemma shuddered, her imagination picturing the killer as he softly slipped through her door, came into her room, saw her asleep, leaving him free to act out his fantasy with her clothes.

'In his room,' Kit continued, 'wherever he lives, he's made a "woman" before, but always comprised of bits and pieces of clothing stolen from here and there. This time, he has the real clothes of a real woman who is lying passive and motionless only a few metres away. This is very exciting for him. I suspect that he can't get hard with a real woman, even with a prostitute, because the issues with his mother are too terrible. But now he's had a taste of a new level of excitement, slashing and stabbing your clothes with you lying just through an open doorway. So now I see him looking around all the time for more openings like this. Doors left open, windows open. Remember, this sort of disorder, this obsession is like a full-time job. You and I don't really fully appreciate this. You need to keep in your mind that this is the *only* energy that motivates him, that gives his life any direction or interest. It is where all his vitality lives and he focuses all his energy towards it. So he's always looking, always waiting. This is his meaning in life. Always cruising and alert, prowling around his territory. He notices where single women live. Watches them drive up in their cars, go into their houses and units. And he gets to know that certain windows stay invitingly open, even at night. He knows his beat.'

'Yes,' said Gemma, remembering the lectures on profiling. 'This sort of killer usually lives in the local area.' She thought of the ground floor flat at Maroubra, the young woman stabbed to death before she'd had a chance to wield her golf club.

'This time,' Kit said, 'he pushes the window up and climbs in, wanting to recreate the excitement of the motel experience, but while he's setting up the girl's clothes . . .' She paused. 'What's her name, by the way?'

'Marcia,' said Gemma. 'Marcia Harding.'

Kit continued, 'Perhaps he knocks something over, perhaps he sneezes. Whatever happens, Marcia wakes up and grabs a golf club. She comes out of the bedroom and sees him. He panics. This wasn't part of the deal. Maybe she screams. Maybe she even hits him. Whatever happens, he kills her with the knife that had, until now, only "killed" in ritual. Now he's moved into a new league and it is highly exciting. Sure, there's anxiety, but he does what he's always done to manage anxiety. Sexualises it. So he probably has the best erection of his life. And this time, he's overpowered a woman. He can do anything to her now. He masturbates over her dead body. Off he goes, into the night, back home to wherever he lives.'

'He lives alone,' said Gemma. 'A mother or a wife or a flatmate would notice the bloody clothes.'

'It's possible that he lives with a parent. He could have disposed of the clothes on the way, but it is more likely that he lives alone,' Kit agreed.

'And now,' said Gemma, 'he's really getting arsey. Now he feels he's in a position to force his own entry. Why passively wait for openings to present themselves?'

'Yes,' said Kit. 'This is the bit that worries me. Taking a girl from her house is very different from how he's operated before.'

'Yes,' said Gemma. 'It's a big difference. It's to do with the changing MO.'

'I know that. But think about it. For behaviour to change like that, something else must have changed in his life. Something,' said Kit, 'has made him less passive. More aggressive.'

'What are the conditions that might make a passive person become more aggressive?' asked Gemma. 'That's exactly why I'm here. To ask you as a therapist who deals with human motivation. Because you see connections that Dr Dickhead Copeland doesn't.'

The two sisters got back to the weeding in silence. Gulls wheeled overhead and, down below, the Pacific purred into the narrow inlet of Gordon's Bay. 'Do you remember when we were little,' Gemma asked, 'climbing into that big wicker clothes basket when our father was screaming round the place? I only just thought of it today.'

'Oh yes,' said Kit. 'I remember that very well. We used to hide in the laundry, too, out the back when things really got bad. You used to sob and sob and I'd hug you and rock you. You were my baby.'

Gemma looked at Kit and her sister's eyes were filled with tears. 'Do you remember Mrs Moresby coming in that night?' asked Gemma.

Kit shook her head, then abruptly stood up and stretched. 'I don't remember much about that night at all,' she said. 'And I can only do so much weeding in one go.' She disappeared into the kitchen and came out with a jug of iced lime juice.

Gemma straightened up too and washed her hands at the garden tap while Kit poured the juice into two glasses. Gemma took hers and wandered back over to the pond. A long-legged water skater trembled on its impossible legs, shivering across the water's surface.

'Something needs to have changed in the killer's life. An increase in pressure can create so much stress in a passive person that they are forced to take action,' said Kit. 'But that increase in pressure can be caused by many different things.'

'A new relationship?' Gemma offered and her sister nodded.

'Yes,' said Kit. 'That's possible. But not a romantic one. If he could function that way, he wouldn't need to make a dummy woman.'

'But he makes the dummy to "kill", not to be romantic with,' Gemma protested.

'In his experience,' said Kit, 'sex and violence are part of the same thing. If he's a child of domestic violence, and it's almost certain that he is, that's what he'll have learned.'

'What about a loss of someone significant? A death?' Gemma suggested after a moment.

Her sister nodded. 'Any big change in his life,' said Kit. 'Something that pushes him into a new place. But it's got to be big.'

'What about moving back in with his mother? That could make him very frustrated,' Gemma said. 'Or maybe losing a job – if he had one – or starting a job that demands too much?'

Kit shrugged. 'Do you think he's employed?' she asked.

'Statistically he's more likely not to be,' her sister answered, remembering her theory.

'Something's happened because he needn't have had a car for the first two attacks,' said Kit. 'But he'd almost have to have a car to abduct someone.'

'That's right,' agreed Gemma. 'He really needs a car to take a strong young woman, even one that he's subdued with the threat of the knife.' Gemma considered as she sipped her lime

juice. 'He'd almost have to immobilise her, too. Tie her with something. We might find that something's missing from her belongings when her mother or sister goes through them. Can you think of any other significant reasons,' she asked her sister, 'that might cause a person to change his behaviour? Why is he changing from passivity to forcefulness? Is violent behaviour like an addiction? Does he need more? And does it get easier with each attack?'

Kit went inside and washed her hands in the laundry and Gemma followed her. She picked up her backpack and slung it round her shoulder, and Kit walked with her to the door.

'I've thought about what you said the other night,' Kit said.

Gemma turned at the door. 'What did I say?'

'I know I have serious issues regarding men. This isn't a surprise to me,' Kit was saying. 'But somehow, what you said, or how you put it, brought it home to me. I'd intellectualised it away before.'

Gemma felt a pleasure that was rare; that she could on occasions offer wisdom to her older sister. 'God knows how long it is since I've had sex,' her sister said, and Gemma looked at her in surprise. 'I've been avoiding the whole thing, the man thing,' Kit stated. 'You were right. I need to make changes. And the best way I can start changing the man perplex – the most appropriate place to start – is to make amends to my son.'

Kit paused. 'Gemma, will you find Will for me?'

'But I thought—'

'Yes, I know,' said Kit. 'I said I couldn't have any contact with him. But I want to know how he is and where he is. That way, I can write to him, to ask him to forgive me.'

'Forgive you for what?' Gemma said.

Kit walked over to the pond and sat on the coping. 'For being such a disappointment to him,' she said. 'As a mother, I mean. I was so tied up with Gerald, with his depression and my own suffering. I wasn't able to give Will the attention that any child – particularly such a bright and beautiful person as he was – needed so he could flourish. I was always pushing him away. Not literally, but by being so preoccupied with everything else. I only really noticed him when he misbehaved. I'd like to write to him and say that I would do anything to change the past, but I can't. That I did my best and that it wasn't good enough. That's all. I just want him to know that I understand why he became a sitting duck for addiction. That I understand that he might hate me and never want to see me again. I will accept that if that's how it is for him. But I want him to know that I can admit that I failed him badly and that I deeply regret it.'

'I can do that for you, Kit,' said Gemma. 'It shouldn't be too difficult to track him down.' They went inside and the kitchen seemed dark after the bright garden.

'I'll start writing the letter then,' Kit said. 'You know, I took him to a psychiatrist once. Because he smashed up the place.' Gemma looked surprised. 'I never told you. I never told anyone. Will was ten at the time. He used one of Gerald's golf clubs and he smashed up the lounge room. The psychiatrist wrote down "destroys the environment" on a card with Will's name on it. He didn't ask any more about it, then he prescribed a tranquilliser for him. And for me, too. I didn't go back. That was when I went to Alexander the first time. I so wish now I'd kept up with it, but it was too confronting for me then. Years later, when I was telling Alexander about how Will had smashed up the room, he questioned me very carefully about exactly what Will had destroyed. He wrote everything down. Then he told me to

go home and read Beatrix Potter's *Tale of Two Bad Mice* and tell me what I'd learned at our next session. I was mystified but I did as he said.' She looked at her watch. 'Hell, is that the time? I'll have to get ready. My next client will be here in a minute.'

'Tell me,' said Gemma, keen to hear the rest of the story. 'Tell me what happened. Did you read the tale?'

But Kit was already putting her out the door, and returning to their earlier conversation.

'There's one very obvious factor,' said Kit, 'that we haven't mentioned that produces pressure and change in a person's life.'

'Oh?' said Gemma, turning at the front door. 'What's that?'

'Starting therapy,' said Kit.

FIFTEEN

When Gemma got home she looked up the phone book. There were several R. Wyldes living in Pymble, but only two with the prefix 'Dr'. She rang them both and, on the second one, she got lucky. 'Are you a medical practitioner or a psychiatrist?' she'd asked.

'I work three days a week as a psychiatrist,' said Rowena Wylde.

'My name is Gemma Lincoln.' She paused. 'I'm Dr Archie Chisholm's younger daughter.'

There was silence on the other end. Finally, Rowena Wylde spoke. 'What could you possibly want with me?'

Gemma couldn't help smiling. You're the psych, she felt like saying. You work it out.

Several hours later, Gemma sat with Rowena Wylde in her comfortable lounge room. Large windows opened onto a lush green garden behind the house that was filled with tree ferns and flowering shrubs, and lorikeets squawked in the trees. As she poured coffee for them both from the plunger, Gemma studied her. She was a prosperous, good-looking woman in her late fifties, hair combed back into a chignon that suited her measured, controlled manner. She wore a knitted jersey suit of classic design and silver and amber earrings.

'Sugar?' she asked, without looking up.

'No thanks,' said Gemma, taking the cup. This time, their eyes met and Gemma noticed that Rowena Wylde's eyes were red-rimmed. Had she been crying? Or was the doctor an insomniac?

'Thank you for agreeing to see me,' said Gemma. 'I want to start the ball rolling to reopen my father's case. But I wanted to talk to you first—'

'On what grounds could you possibly reopen the case?' Rowena asked.

'There have been a lot of important developments in bloodstain interpretation,' Gemma said. 'The evidence that convicted my father was purely circumstantial.'

'I see.' Dr Wylde considered. 'Or are you visiting me to find out whether or not I was likely to be the cause of a *crime passionel*?' There was the barest hint of a smile.

'Not at all,' said Gemma. 'But to ask you whether or not *you* think my father is guilty. You are a professional woman. Your job is to form conclusions, make interpretations.' The opposite of me, Gemma thought. My work is simply to gather intelligence. Which I'm doing right now.

'That is true in general,' said Dr Wylde. 'But I was emotionally involved with your father. And as we know, the emotions are not always congruent with one's professionalism.'

Gemma memorised that last statement. One day, she hoped she'd be able to pass it on to Kit and they could laugh over it. But not now. This was serious. It was an odd sensation, to be sitting here with her father's ex-lover, discussing these issues.

Dr Wylde stood up and walked with her coffee to the window. She looked out into the garden and took a sip. 'You know, of course – or perhaps you don't – that our profession,

the profession I shared with your father, is statistically very unhealthy. Emotionally and psychologically.' She turned round and leaned her trim bottom against the windowsill, looking at Gemma. 'Probably physically, too. People assume it's because of the burdens we carry, because we are sin eaters, the confessions, the strain of dealing with disordered, suffering patients, year after year. Listening to their hatred, their resentments, their distortions, their insanity.' She raised an eyebrow and sipped her coffee.

'You say people assume this? Do you think there are other reasons?' Gemma asked.

The older woman stood a moment, watching a group of rainbow lorikeets vanish into an early flowering eucalypt tree in next door's garden. 'Why are we drawn to such a vocation in the first place? People who become psychiatrists, especially those who work with analysis, have a lot of issues of their own. Perhaps we need to keep them away. Of course,' she added, 'the same could be said of all human beings. But it is a fact that the suicide rate among psychiatrists is extremely high.'

She opened a sliding window and the shrill fussing of the lorikeets was plain to hear. 'Perhaps it is because we intellectualise the emotions, as someone recently said somewhere.' She paused a moment. 'I'm saying "perhaps" a lot, aren't I. As I get older, I get less sure of everything.' She half closed the window again. 'I wonder if the work we do is ultimately helpful. Or if we actually prevent people from contacting their own depths. Whenever a person is *talking* about feeling, he is not feeling. While he is talking about violence, he is not being violent. Psychiatrists suicide at an alarming rate. And suicide is the ultimate violence against the self. It is to self what murder is to others. Why do so many of our number act out the suicidal part of the suicidal-homicidal split?'

Gemma was surprised at the way the woman was talking. Is this a doctor's attempt at small talk, Gemma wondered, or is she trying to do this gently, breaking it to me in the softest way she knows how? 'Are you saying you think my father was a homicidal man?' she asked. 'Capable of murder?'

Dr Wylde shrugged. 'Human beings are violent creatures,' she said. 'Are you asking me whether or not I believe that *he* was capable of murdering his wife?'

'I am,' said Gemma.

'I believe it's unlikely,' she said. 'Simply because Marianne Chisholm, your mother, was in a doctor–patient relationship with him as well as a being his wife. Psychiatrists rarely kill their patients so directly.' She laughed. 'We take the liberty of interpreting their behaviour to them. We feed them all kinds of constructs. All kinds of drugs. And it's not uncommon for us to have affairs with patients. We sometimes even marry them. But it's rare that we kill them by way of murder.'

'Tell me more about why you say that,' said Gemma, leaning forward and forgetting her coffee.

Dr Wylde sat back on her chair and put her cup down. 'Your mother was your father's patient. She was a very depressed woman. Did you know that? When she wasn't depressed, she was unbearably anxious. She was incapable of dealing with life on its own terms and Archie medicated her. That's what we did in those days. We still do it now as you know. In the 'fifties and 'sixties, the new tranquillisers seemed to be the answer to the mystery of suffering, especially female suffering. Women who "had everything" as we used to think, and yet were deeply depressed. The "worried well".'

'You seem to know an awful lot about my mother,' said Gemma, feeling oddly protective of the dead.

Rowena Wylde's face changed and Gemma wondered if she were being treated to her professional, caring face. 'It was

natural that your father spoke of her to me,' said the doctor. 'We were close and he had a lot of problems with her. And you know he was a very ambitious man. He wouldn't divorce her, even though she was—' Here she paused, wondering how to phrase the next part. '—somewhat of a liability to a man who showed such promise.'

'Did she want a divorce?' Gemma asked, surprised, and Dr Wylde's answer surprised her even more.

'No,' she said. 'And neither did he.' She put her cup down on the little cedar table near her chair. 'I did. But he wouldn't. He wanted to open a private hospital in partnership with Marianne's father, who had a lot of money. In the 'fifties, many of us were convinced that the old hypotheses were wrong, and that the answer to mental illness lay in physical rather than analytical psychiatry. Your father visited Tulane University in Louisiana, where a very well-respected psychiatrist was carrying out electrode experiments on living brains, and not only on animals, either. His name was Heath. He used terminally ill patients and people from mental institutions as guinea pigs. You can read up on his stuff in any medical library. It takes a particular sort of courage to carry out that sort of work. Of course, we wouldn't do that now.'

Oh really? Gemma thought as Dr Wylde continued. 'Your father was convinced that what a restless brain needed was rest. He wanted to set up a hospital where he could "switch" people's brains off and give them a chemically induced rest cure.'

'Like Chelmsford?' Gemma asked, feeling shocked.

Dr Wylde raised an eyebrow. 'No, no, no,' she said. 'Chelmsford was a nightmare. But your father was convinced that narcotherapy was moving in the right direction. With back-up from the relevant experts in long-term sedation. He

wanted a hospital in which he could practise his ideas and he wouldn't have risked losing the support of the Lincoln money by divorcing the old surgeon's daughter. Dr Lincoln was a force to be reckoned with and very powerful in the medical lobby of those days. He'd destroyed the careers of several promising doctors whose moral code didn't accord with his religious principles.'

Gemma remembered her Methodist grandfather, the forbidding presence in their grandmother's house, and wasn't surprised to hear this. But the notion of the Lincoln money seemed somewhat romantic. What Lincoln money? There had been a modest inheritance for the two sisters, spent long ago. This is starting to sound like a Mills and Boon romance, she thought. Also, this new aspect of her father's professional interests was upsetting her. She hadn't got what she wanted even though she didn't know quite what that was, but she didn't want to stay any longer talking to this woman about her family. She stood up, irritated and frustrated.

Dr Wylde took the cue and stood with her and they walked towards the door together. 'I know this wasn't a social visit,' said Dr Wylde. She stopped and looked Gemma in the eyes. 'You want to know if your father is a killer, don't you.' The brutal statement hung in the air. 'Of course you do. Why else would you be here? You see,' Dr Wylde continued, 'if you really believed he was innocent, there'd be no need to talk to me. To talk to anyone. You'd just go ahead and reopen the case.'

Gemma remembered Kit saying that one of the things that was most unacceptable to her about many psychiatrists was their arrogance in assuming they knew more about a person's inner workings than the individual himself did, as if human beings ran along predictable, theoretical rails laid down by the great Victorian and Edwardian fathers, and that they

alone had the key to all psychologies. And yet, the woman had touched on something.

'I don't need to talk to anyone to convince myself,' Gemma said, stung by Dr Wylde's words. 'But you can surely understand that I would want to meet you. You were part of it.' She felt defensive, off-balance and angry.

'It was a long time ago,' said Dr Wylde, opening the front door as if their entire discussion was now irrelevant, vanishing like a mist into the past. Gemma stepped past her, eager to be gone.

'It's true I was a part of it. But there were others,' Dr Wylde said. 'You see, Archie was a philanderer.' She must have seen the shock on Gemma's face because she softened her tone. 'I'm sorry. I forget that this is not just about an ex-lover of mine. We are talking of your father after all.'

'How many others?'

Dr Wylde shrugged. 'It wasn't something I wanted to know about. Several. He was a man of strong appetites and, well . . .' She thought better of speaking further.

'And my mother was a depressed woman,' Gemma finished for her.

Dr Wylde leaned closer and touched Gemma briefly on the arm. 'I'll tell you something that nobody knows. The woman is dead now and it doesn't matter.' The look on Gemma's face must have put her off, because she took her hand away and half turned, as if regretting the moment of intimacy.

'Don't speak of my mother like that,' said Gemma, the heat of anger flushing her.

The doctor turned back to her. 'No, no,' she said. 'You misunderstand me. I'm not speaking of your mother.' There was the slightest pause and she continued. 'There was a woman – one of Archie's patients – who believed she was in

love with him.' The doctor snorted. 'That sort of dependency is very common in our business and a skilled practitioner knows how to utilise it as part of the therapy. I'm sure you know about it. Perhaps Archie was not assiduous enough in discouraging the woman. Perhaps he even cultivated her interest . . . Whatever happened, the woman suicided when Archie told her he wouldn't be leaving Marianne. That much I do know. It all happened just a few days before the death of your mother. Your father was just very lucky that she didn't leave a note exposing him.' She shrugged. 'Although it hardly mattered later – with what eventuated.'

The two women stood a moment in silence and then Gemma turned away. Dr Wylde watched her as she walked down the steps and towards the front gate.

As Gemma opened the door to get into the Mazda, she turned and saw the doctor still standing at her front door. Gemma walked back to the front gate so she wouldn't have to speak loudly.

'Dr Wylde,' she said, 'did you kill my mother?'

The woman's face drained paper white. She opened her mouth as if to say something, then turned on her heel and swung inside, slamming the door behind her. In the car, Gemma's mobile started ringing. She unlocked the door and snatched the phone up, sliding into the seat. 'Hullo?'

'Gemma, it's me,' said Angie. 'We've found Bianca Perrault. I'm at the crime scene now. National Park near Heathcote.'

'Where? What happened?' Gemma gripped the steering wheel with her other hand.

'We haven't got a formal ID yet.' Her friend's voice nearly broke up and Gemma had to fight to hear her. 'This place is tight as a fish's . . . wouldn't be able to get you in . . . doctor's

doing his stuff right now . . . severe stab wounds to the upper body . . .'

'I'm not hearing you too well,' said Gemma, seeing once again her slashed clothes, the mutilated blouse and skirt.

Angie's voice strengthened momentarily then faded again. '. . . all wrapped in garbage bags and rolled up in a doona . . . shoved under some logs along a fire trail. Some hikers found her. Come in later when . . .'

'Hullo?' said Gemma. 'Angie? You're breaking up.' But there was no response and Gemma sat for a while in her vehicle. Her mother, Dr Wylde, Mrs Moresby, the accounts clerk at Maroubra and now Bianca all whizzed around in a danse macabre with the ghost of a thirty-year-old suicide. She flopped back in the seat with the phone still in her loose fingers. Sometimes, the screen on her laptop just stopped, frozen, as too much data hit it too quickly. And that's what seemed to be happening to her mind right this minute in the car outside Dr Wylde's leafy residence. She recalled the white face and shocked expression of the woman. Would I be so shocked if someone asked me a question like that, she wondered. Some moments later, when she could move, she started the car with trembling fingers.

SIXTEEN

Clive had decided to come to as many sessions a week as he could for the next few months and Kit had offered him a cancellation. He seemed tense when he arrived and sat down heavily on the mattresses without looking directly at her.

'I'm full of hatred,' he said.

Kit nodded. 'We all are,' she said, 'until we realise it. Until we can admit it.'

'What can I do about it?' he asked.

'Feelings of hatred are powerful energies in your mind. It's no use trying to fight them with other parts of your mind. You just end up with a civil war between your ears. Let's try a different approach.'

Half an hour later, Clive lay back with his eyes closed, deeply relaxed.

'I want you to give the demon of hatred a form in your imagination,' said Kit. 'Tell me what he looks like.' She saw his face move to become very grim.

'I can see him very clearly,' Clive said. 'He looks like a medieval inquisitor. He's dressed like a Dominican. A shaven head with tonsure. Long, cruel fingers. I think he would be good at turning the thumbscrews. He has a tight, pointed face. No lips. Just a hard white line.

Goodness.' His voice changed. 'My mother had a mouth like that.'

There was a silence. 'His eyes. I can't really see his eyes. They are shadowed. Like a death's head. He is very big. And very powerful.'

'We're going to feed him up,' said Kit. 'Really feed him up. Because the more he's pushed away, the more he's denied by you when you start to feel guilty and bad about the thoughts in your own mind, the more hateful and powerful he becomes. You start to feed him and then you pull the food away from him before he can ever satisfy himself. The more famished a demon becomes, the more dangerous.' She paused. 'Can you imagine me making a bowl out of the top of my skull? Imagine I can just lift the whole top of my skull off and turn it upside down.'

She saw Clive smile slightly at this, but he continued to breathe evenly. 'Now,' she said, 'this skull bowl is growing, becoming bigger and bigger until it is a huge cauldron. It is so big it can take anything you want to put in it. What can we do to feed this demon?'

His voice was soft and slow. 'I've never fed a demon before,' he said. 'I don't know what they like to eat.'

'If they're not fed, they'll eat human minds and hearts. That's why it's essential that we feed them well.'

He lay silently for a moment. 'We can put a whole loaf of bread in the cauldron,' he said. 'And a whole tub of butter and a jar of jam.'

'He needs more than that,' she said. 'He's been famished all your life so his appetite is ravenous. He's like a genie in a bottle.'

Clive's breath became quicker. 'Let's give him all the loaves of bread in the world,' he said. 'And all the butter.'

'That's more like it,' said Kit. 'Anything else?'

Clive was warming to the exercise. 'Let's give him all the silos of wheat in the world.'

'Tip them all into the cauldron,' said Kit. She could see the change in his energy. His face was pinker and the cells more filled. 'Pour in all the wheat.'

'And all the milk in the world,' he added. 'And all the cows.' He stopped. 'Oh,' he said. 'Is it all right to do that to the cows? I like cows.'

'All cows,' she said. 'All the cows are going into the cauldron.'

'And all the sheep. And every chicken in the world.' He paused again. 'And all the pigs. This demon is very powerful. He wants more than just food.'

'Give him what he wants,' said Kit. 'For the first time in his existence let him feel what it's like to get what he wants. To be satisfied. Let him have satisfaction. No guilt, no shame. Just feed him.'

'In goes my wife. In goes my mother. And my girlfriend. All the buildings in the world are going into the cauldron,' said Clive. 'And all the volcanoes, all the great mountains of the world. All the oceans. All the ships, the cars, the rivers, the aircraft. All the military installations. Rockets. Bombs. And let's give him the moon,' he added. 'And the stars and the sun. All the galaxies. Yes,' he added, 'even the ones we don't know about. In they go into the cauldron.'

'You've got almost everything in there now.'

'I think all the people should go in, too.'

'Good,' said Kit. She took a deep breath.

'There's something else,' he said. 'Something else that should go in.' She saw a frown line his forehead. 'I want the whole world to go in.'

'Into the pot with the whole world,' she said.

'There are still the galaxies,' he said, 'and deep space.'

'In they go,' she said.

'And now me,' Clive said in a barely audible voice. 'That's everything now.'

His breathing was slow and steady and there was a long silence which Kit finally broke. 'The cauldron is completely filled,' she said. 'You could invite this demon of hate to sit down comfortably and take up a demon spoon and eat and eat and eat until he's so full he just drops off like a leech.'

There was a long pause. Kit sat, watching the movements on the man's face. He was somewhere a long way away in his mind, feeding the demon.

'Yes,' he said faintly. 'He's feeding. He's cramming everything into his mouth. It's huge. The size of the Harbour Bridge. He is so starved. He's eating everything, getting bigger and fatter. Now he's even huge enough to contain God.'

Kit saw one tear roll down his face. It was more, she thought, than the normal lacrimation of a trance state. His breathing was fuller and richer. His chest and even his belly moved. She noticed a subtle change in his body energy and his upper chest seemed to relax while his legs looked more as if they belonged to him.

After a while, Clive opened his eyes and looked around. 'Well,' he said. 'Well, well.' He closed his eyes again for a while. The barest smile touched his lips as he opened his eyes again. 'The room seems different,' he said. 'It feels like it's changed.'

Kit waited, sitting up.

Finally he smiled at her. His face was younger and softer. 'That was a very interesting experience,' he finally said. 'I felt something happen in me. I can't explain it.'

'You don't have to,' said Kit. 'Just have it.' She glanced at the clock on the mantelpiece. 'When you feel steady enough,'

she said, 'it'll be time to go. I'll look out and see if my next client has arrived.'

Gemma had forgotten until she arrived home that Taxi was still missing. The sudden pang caused her to go on another search for him, calling him from the front of the flats, peering down the scrubby incline in front, wondering if he'd climbed down onto the rocks to do a spot of fishing. She left a note under Mrs Ratbag's door asking if she'd seen him, and posted a picture of him and her phone number on the upstairs verandah that formed a communal area for the two upstairs units. Everyone seemed to be out when she knocked. She went downstairs again, worried about her missing cat. To take her mind off him, she went through her accounting system, but it only made her miss him more. He should be here, driving her mad, jumping up on the desk, treading on the keyboard, forcing the computer to do weird things until she banished him. She filed away Noel's and Spinner's most recent field reports and tidied up, needing this routine work to settle her down. She rang Noel, and talked about setting up electronic surveillance at the Cross Weld Construction warehouse and offices.

She took out Philip Hawker's notebooks again. They were unofficial lists of names and dates, of interviews and only the name 'Dr Rowena Wylde' meant anything to her. She struggled to make sense of the untidy, hurried writing. According to his notes, Philip Hawker had visited Rowena Wylde twice. He had also visited an Arik Kreutzvalt at North Sydney, the first time four days after the murder of her mother, the second a week later. '20.9.67 4.45pm. Routine house call', she read. 'States Chisholm made call because subject is on heavy medication – not able to drive to the rooms. Stayed about twenty minutes. K states he and

AC talked about his condition.' Under this was scrawled in another pen but in the same hand, 'AC's only house call in records that week. Check criminal record'. This was underlined heavily. She wondered briefly whether the ambiguous note in Philip Hawker's youthful hand meant that Kreutzvalt *had* a criminal record, or was a reminder for the note taker to check out whether or not he did.

Gemma lifted her head and stared at the wall. This was one of her father's patients, someone to whom he'd paid a house call on the day of the university dinner. The day of her mother's death. She opened the drawer and pulled out her father's statement, made to the police the night her mother died, skimming it until nearly halfway down. 'At about two-thirty . . .', she read, 'went to the bank but because there was a long queue, did not get money out then. Made a brief house call to a patient'. Was Arik Kreutzvalt that patient? 'After that, I left and drove straight to the house.'

She found Philip Hawker's number and phoned him, but there was no answer and no answering machine. She rang Angie. Her heart was sad about her missing cat. Nothing that I love stays, she thought, thinking of the disconnections of her life. I'm getting introspective like Kit. What Beatrix Potter tale should I read? she wondered as she made her way up to the car. 'The tale of a bad lost cat,' she thought, but no such tale existed. She had a feeling it wouldn't be something from Beatrix Potter that demonstrated her tale. It would be more like something from the Brothers Grimm. The oppressive feeling she had, of missing something about the effigy killer, would not leave her alone. She reviewed the crime scenes in her mind and was still trying to make sense of the incongruities when she realised she'd driven the whole way to the police centre on automatic.

* * *

'This is how she was,' said Angie, talking as the crime scene video ran silently on, glancing at her watch. 'She's gone to the morgue for the autopsy. Her mother's there with her. I left her sitting beside the body with one of the bereavement counsellors, stroking her daughter's hair. Some kind soul down there had cleaned the body up and put dressings over the worst of the wounds. I've also got some close-up photos.'

Gemma picked up the newly developed pictures, then turned her attention back to the crime scene video. She saw a rolled-up fabric bundle lying partly hidden alongside a fallen tree trunk.

'That's what we saw first,' said Angie, looking over her shoulder. 'The bushwalkers had pulled some of the timber away, wanting to get at some dry wood for the barbecue area.'

Gemma sifted through the prints until she found one of the body, free now of the enclosing doona. Bianca lay with her knees drawn slightly up and both hands under her chin, still wearing what looked like the top of shortie pyjamas. But the savage wounds were clear to see, concentrated around the front of the neck and the upper chest. 'Not much blood,' she said.

'The blood's somewhere else,' said Angie. 'Wherever she was killed.'

'Where is the other part of the pyjamas?'

Angie shrugged. 'She only had the top when we found her. We're continuing to search the area.'

Gemma carefully went through the rest of the photographs, thinking about the conversation she'd had with Kit, how they'd both come to the same conclusion that something big had changed in the world of the killer. 'Are you thinking what I'm thinking?' asked Gemma, looking at her friend.

'About this?' said Angie, tapping a photograph with a clear-laquered fingertip. 'I don't know,' she said. 'The stab wounds are so frenzied. We've seen that before on your clothes as well.'

'If it's the same guy, I mean,' Gemma added.

'I've got a feeling it is,' said Angie.

'And yet this is so methodical,' said Gemma. 'This gift wrapping.' She indicated the layers of plastic and fabric. 'These pictures are saying something to me.'

Angie nodded and started picking up the photographs and laying them out in sequence, moving from the distant to close-up shots. 'Yes,' she said. 'You're right.' First, she put down a long shot of the body dump site. Under the haphazard stack of brush and leafy branches, the fabric of the doona could just be seen, looking like a dumped mattress. Next to that, she laid a close-up of the rolled-up doona, and beside that picture another of the garbage-bagged body lying on the doona with the bloodstained fabric now spread out on either side. Then at the end of the row of photos she put down a picture of the ravaged body of Bianca Perrault, now freed from the dark green plastic, lying curled up on the top of the mess that surrounded her. Her beautiful hair still shone in the sun and Gemma could see the fabric of her shorty pyjamas had a pattern of green and red teddy bears.

'You tell me,' said Angie. 'What *are* these pictures saying?' She slid off the table top where she'd been sitting and went to a drawer in her office, pulling out a packet of cigarettes.

'But you've stopped smoking,' said Gemma.

'Just started again,' said Angie. 'I met someone on the weekend. A real dish.' She shrugged. 'And I cracked. I just had to have a smoke.' She waved the unlit cigarette towards the ceiling. 'I just hope I don't set the bloody smoke alarms off.' She lit up with a match and blew the

smoke away, dispersing it. 'I've got to get copies of these photos for the rest of the team.' Angie blew more smoke defiantly out of her mouth. 'God, I needed that,' she said. 'This guy was fantastic in the cot. He was everywhere at the same time. Still don't know how he did it. It's months since I did anything wicked.'

'That's not wicked,' said Gemma. 'This is,' and she pushed the last photograph in the row along the table towards her friend.

Angie picked it up. 'What's got into him?' she asked, looking at Bianca's body. 'What's happened to him that things are so different this time?'

Gemma studied the pictures again, her eyes moving along the row she'd laid down, each layer unwrapped to reveal the next stage, until instead of a Russian babushka doll the violated human body showed in the middle of the bloody wrappings.

'Your little friend Bo Bayliss came in after all and sat with Devlin for three hours,' said Angie. 'I'll get you a copy of the face she came up with.' She hopped off the desk, killed the cigarette in the sink and left the room.

With Angie out of the room for a moment, Gemma picked up a phone. She pulled the piece of paper she'd found at the bottom of Steve's rubbish out of her pocket, smoothing it until it lay flat on the desk. Deliberately, she dialled the numbers. It rang and rang and she was about to hang up when he answered. Gemma felt a painful, excited sensation about her heart and throat.

'Hullo?' he said. For a second, she couldn't speak.

'Who is this?' His voice was harder now, suspicious.

'It's me,' she said, feeling foolish.

'How did you get this number?' Typical Steve, she

thought, her heart rate soaring. Thinks about security before anything else.

'I found it,' she said. Now she saw where this line of questioning might go and felt ashamed of her automatic confiscation of the contents of his wheelie bin.

'How did you find it?'

'Aren't you even going to say hello?' she asked in a way that she regretted the minute the words were out.

'Hullo,' he said flatly. 'How did you find this number?'

She could hear Angie returning, her footsteps in the hall. Then her friend reappeared, carrying a picture. Gemma slumped, ashamed. There was no way she could answer with her friend in earshot.

'Steve, I—'

But he interrupted her. 'Gemma, this number is supposed to be secure. I don't know who you've used to get it. But don't ever ring here again. You should know that I had to leave some of my gear behind with some personal items in it when the drug squad busted my operation. If someone in the Raiders gets hold of that and works out who you are – that you've been an associate of mine – you could end up gang-raped by a bunch of outlaw bikies. Not to mention also very dead. For your own safety as well as mine, don't contact me again.'

'What sort of personal items? How would they know about me?' Gemma asked, but the line was already beeping.

Angie held out the FACE computer image and Gemma took it from her, replacing the handset, trying not to show the pain and anger she felt. Associate of mine, he'd said. As if she were some sort of business acquaintance. She stared at the picture Angie passed her, the thin face of the man who'd pulled the knife on platinum-fringed Bo Bayliss as she lay naked on the floor with her clothes neatly laid out like the effigy of a woman. Gemma stared at the man's blank

eyes, lipless mouth, highboned cheeks. There was something familiar about him.

'God,' she said, 'he looks like Spinner!'

'What personal items?' Angie queried. 'And who the hell is Spinner?'

Gemma couldn't answer; it was too much. Everything just overflowed in her and she felt tears fill her eyes as she put the computer image down on the table and told Angie what had happened that night at her place when Steve found the video. 'And then he goes and warns me about being traced by the bikies and murdered. He called me "an associate".' She wiped her nose and sniffed.

'But he's away so much,' said Angie, her loyal friend. 'What does he expect you to do? Meditate?'

Gemma blew her nose. 'I don't know what he expects me to do, Angie. But he doesn't want me to go out and pick up men, that's for sure.'

Angie considered. 'He's got a point though, Gemma. About you being in danger. Outlaw bikie gangs are not known for their forgiving natures. If they can't get at him, it is just possible that they might strike at someone close to him. Or they'll do you both. Execution for betrayal is part of their law.'

'But I'm not close to him now,' said Gemma, as a wave of sadness brought more tears to her eyes.

'Any more men following you?' asked Angie.

Gemma shook her head. 'No, no,' she said to Angie, understanding the implication. 'Bikies don't go to gyms. He was just a pest.' But now she wasn't so sure. 'And someone was prowling round Kit's place the other night. I saw where he'd torn the vines away from the fence.'

'What is it,' said Angie, 'about you two sisters that you both have men following you?'

Two sisters, Imelda Moresby had said. Two killers. Two mistresses. Two stalkers. Two deaths. Thirty years ago, her father's mistress had suicided and her mother had been murdered. Now two more women had been murdered: Marcia Harding and Bianca Perrault. Was there some link? Gemma felt haunted by these pairings.

'Bloody men,' Angie was saying. 'Bloody mongrel deadshit arsehole bastard dickhead *men*.'

With an effort, Gemma brought her attention back to the investigation she was involved in, whether she liked it or not. She blew her nose, cursing when her finger poked through the tissue. She recalled Kit's words and picked up the last poignant photo of Bianca while Angie studied the photos that Gemma had already passed to her. 'Behaviour changes when reality changes, Kit said,' Gemma stated, throwing the tissue into a wastepaper bin.

'Kit should know,' said Angie, taking the last picture from her. The FACE image on the table staring sightlessly at the ceiling from its vacant eyes brought her full attention back to the job. 'Consider all the different factors in this picture. We're being told something here by evidence that doesn't lie. Only our failure to read it will mislead us.'

The two women sat in silence. The sense of foreboding became acute. 'I've got a terrible feeling,' said Gemma, staring at the computer-generated face, 'that there's something huge about this case staring straight at me. And I can't see it.'

SEVENTEEN

Kit was making coffee in the kitchen when the phone rang.

'Kit?'

'Gerald. Hullo.'

There was a pause. 'I was hoping to come round. There are still a few of my things with your things. It's Saturday. I hoped I wouldn't be interrupting your work.'

'Yes,' she said. 'There are. And I don't work today.'

A long silence between them reminded her of how their marriage had been for a long time. 'You could drop round tonight,' she said. 'I hope by then to have the last of the unpacking finished.'

'I've asked Gemma Lincoln to be here today,' said Angie in the Strike Force room, 'because not only was she the killer's first target to come to light, she was also a police-woman for ten years and has a good reputation among the people who knew her.' Garry Copeland looked at her, raising his eyebrows. 'Some of you here may remember her,' Angie added.

Gemma made sure her eyes didn't connect with Bruno's, who seemed intent on doodling on a small notepad. Beside him, Colin, the intelligence officer, Ian Bloor and Sandy Mac

sat opposite Angie. Garry turned to Gemma. 'Gemma here also made a video recording of what the offender had done to her clothes and that has proved most helpful,' he said. 'It was her action that got us the first DNA sample.' He looked around. 'We need to pull in anyone and anything that can help us with this fellow.' Even me, Gemma thought.

Tacked onto the whiteboard behind him, the FACE printout stared out over the table. Some of the eyes around the table were checking Gemma, while others peered at the FACE image of the man Bo Bayliss had described. 'Right,' said Dr Copeland, remembering to defer to Angie who was in charge. 'Over to you, Angie.'

'Take a good look at that face,' she said. 'And remember to keep in mind that just because it *looks* like a photograph, it's not. There probably isn't anyone in the world that looks exactly like this. We've created this picture. So don't lock on to that face. It's just to give you an idea. I wonder sometimes if the old Penri's weren't better, because they gave you the idea but not a perfected fixed image like this.' She paused. 'Anyway, that's by the way. The other thing I want to draw to your attention is that there's been a distinct change in the MO as you can see from these photographs. I know most of you have been to the crime scenes. But looking at these pictures is helpful for revision. I've asked Garry to talk to us this morning so that he can brief us on anything he thinks is important from the psychological point of view.' She nodded at Dr Copeland, who took over. His sweaty forehead shone in the fluorescent lights as he opened a notebook in front of him and glanced down at the handwritten points.

'I've just come from the morgue,' he said. 'The initial examination suggests that the same knife's been used as was used to kill the woman at Maroubra.' He tossed a close-up photograph of the knife wounds onto the table. 'And the

attack on the clothing. Of course that won't be confirmed until all the tests and measurements are in from the analysts.' He looked around the table and nodded to Gemma. 'We're naturally going through Bianca's relatives and friends – and Marcia Harding's, too. Just in case there's anything helpful there. This image behind me here . . .' he indicated the FACE printout, 'might well be the man we're looking for.'

Angie briefly outlined Bo Bayliss's story of the man with the knife, then showed them the computer image of a wicked-looking knife. 'This is the sort of knife we're looking for,' she said. 'Once we've got the exact size of the blade and the serrations from the PM doctor, I'll get copies out to all of you. And to the media section. There's a distinctive curve to the tip of the blade.'

Dr Copeland pointed to it with a bitten fingernail. 'We're not telling the media this, and the doc only just told me, but that hooked blade actually drew sections of the viscera back out with it through the skin.' There were no reactions from the group; such horrific detail was an everyday affair here. 'So that makes it a bit different from the usual run of the mill weapons. And it gives us that something extra.' Angie and Gemma looked at each other. 'We've got classic organised and disorganised aspects to this case together here,' he continued. 'For those of you who still don't know what that means . . .' He pushed over a pile of collated booklets. Angie slid one over towards herself and Gemma. 'A Psychological Assessment of Crime – Profiling' was printed in large letters across the top above the New South Wales Police insignia. Gemma glanced over while Angie flicked through the pages. Others passed copies around the table.

'The bottom line of profiling is this,' said Garry. 'A crime – like any other activity – quite naturally reflects the personality of the offender. If a person in their everyday life

tends to be organised, any crime he commits will also tend to be like that. This fellow,' he pointed to the stills from the crime scene at Maroubra, 'is not organised. He climbs through a window that's left open. He hangs around waiting for opportunity to knock. He goes into a motel room because the door isn't properly closed.' He stared hard at Gemma as he spoke. 'There's no reason to assume that he was going to do anything different at Maroubra than he did at the Tusculum Hotel. But something happened. He was taken off guard when the woman went to investigate the noise. That event changed his MO. In one night he changes from pervert to murderer.' Garry looked around the group. Some were listening to him, others were hunched over the booklets, reading. 'That first murder wasn't planned. He killed because he was interrupted.'

'But he's organised in the sense that he carries his own knife around with him,' said Gemma. 'He doesn't just grab one from the crime scene.'

'That's true,' said Garry. 'He's also organised in the way he cases his area, looking for a chance. He doesn't just randomly hit out. He's always looking, always hoping he'll find some chink he can slip through. He probably lives local to the crime scene areas.'

So he organises his own personal necessities, Gemma thought, but waits for a random opportunity to use them. He doesn't plan the crime; just always goes prepared. Gemma thought of her own work, of Spinner and Noel cruising the streets, following vehicles, waiting for the right moment to take a still photograph or operate the hidden video camera as their unsuspecting quarry went about his business. We're all watchers, Spinner once said. We're all voyeurs. Waiting for the right moment to strike. The thought made her hair follicles prick.

'So what you're saying,' said Angie, 'is that he has organised and disorganised traits.' She paused. 'Sounds like me.' Laughter broke the tension in the room.

'It certainly does, ma'am,' said Bruno, and there was no avoiding the hostility in his tone.

'Up until the Bianca Perrault abduction and murder, his traits were consistent,' Copeland continued, ignoring the undercurrents around the table. 'Then something happened.'

'Something's changed,' said Gemma. 'In his life.'

Garry Copeland raised an eyebrow at her, wrinkling his polished forehead. 'It was a dark day for the New South Wales Police Service when you left us,' he said. He looked around the group to see if his irony was properly appreciated before he continued. 'We've also had the results back from the Scan expert who looked over the statements we took earlier from the people who knew Bianca. I'm told there are two individuals we should talk to again. That's being done now.' His mobile rang and he snatched it up.

'Copeland speaking,' he said. He wrinkled his domed forehead even more. 'Okay. Right. I'll come down straight away.' He rang off, closed his notebook and stood up. 'I've got to go. I'll get copies of the results of the tests back to you all as soon as possible.'

'Thanks, Garry,' said Angie. 'Can we all meet back here tomorrow morning and see how things are going? Say ten o'clock?' She put the lid on her pen and clipped it into the pocket of her suit coat as she stood up. 'Everything you get, give to Colin the intelligence officer. So let's get out there, people, and give him plenty to do.'

As the two women left the room, Gemma turned to Angie. 'Can you meet me tonight? I've got an appointment with Dr Firestone. I'd like you to come with me.' Angie looked at her watch. 'Please,' said Gemma. 'I hate asking.'

'As long as it's not late,' Angie said. 'I've got a heavy date with Dreamboat.'

At ten past seven there was a knock on the front door. Kit walked through the house, switched on the front room light and opened the door. Gerald walked in and looked around. Kit studied him closely, looking for the effects of Alexander's work on her ex-husband's body. There was something different there already, she thought. Gerald was straighter, taller somehow. The familiar collapsed hunch of the shoulders and the poked out neck had already subtly changed. His dark hair and eyes seemed more alive, his colouring less sallow. If she were seeing him for the first time, instead of through the resentment-coloured lenses of years of misunderstandings and arguments, she conceded, she might even think he was a good-looking man.

'You look well,' she said as she let him in, leading him through the house to the kitchen at the back. Halfway down the hall Gerald said to her, 'I wish I'd started going to Alexander years ago.' So do I, Kit said to herself, but thought better of saying it out loud.

'I've just put some coffee on to brew. Would you like one?'

He nodded and looked around. 'This is a nice place, Kit. You've really landed on your feet.' She raised an eyebrow and started getting cups and the sugar bowl out of the cupboard. 'I've got a little place in Newtown. I'm thinking of buying it. But the price they're asking is ridiculous.'

'I've got your things together,' she said. 'The little watercolour and those china fire dogs you always loved. I've wrapped them up so they should be all right in that.' She indicated a box on the floor near the kitchen door stuffed

with paper. She poured coffee, and was about to stir in the two teaspoons of sugar Gerald had liked.

'No, no,' he said. 'No sugar these days.' Then he asked, 'Can I look outside?'

Kit took him out into the garden and they stood a moment in silence, holding their cups of coffee, listening to the swing of the sea.

'What a great spot,' he said again after a while.

'Yes,' she said. 'I've always dreamed of a place like this.'

Suddenly, Gerald was crying; the terrible rasping sounds a man makes because the machinery is so rusty and unused. Kit stood near him, not touching him, not saying anything. She had never known her husband to cry. Her professional mind knew this was a sign of growth; her woman's heart went out to him.

'I'm sorry,' he was saying. 'I'm sorry I buggered everything up. I'm sorry I hurt you so much.'

Kit waited while he put his coffee cup down, blew his nose, wiped it and put his large handkerchief back in his pocket.

'I'm sorry too,' she said. 'That I didn't know what to do until it was too late. Neither of us intended to hurt the other.' She thought of the years she'd wasted trying to make him better, wasting the energy she needed, neglecting her own life, her son, assuming a responsibility that had never been hers, thereby only delaying his eventual collapse into despair and his final search for a therapy that would work for him.

'We only have one soul to save,' she said. 'That's something I know. And that is a lifetime's work.'

'I should never have married,' he said, not hearing her. 'I'm just beginning to realise how much hostility I have in me. Towards women. Towards everyone, really.'

Join the club, she thought. 'We're all full of it, Gerald. Somehow, it's so much easier to hate than to love.'

He was defensive again and eager to be gone. 'But then,' he said, 'we'd never have had Will.' He looked hard at her. 'That might have been a better thing all round.' Kit decided to remain silent. Gerald finished his coffee and there was an awkward silence between them.

On the way out of the house, he turned to her. 'I think of Will a lot lately. I'm starting to see that my depression had profound effects on him. I've been going over the events of my childhood with Alexander and I'm quite astonished at the similarities. There are connections I'm seeing now that I didn't realise were there at the time.'

'I've asked Gemma to help me contact him,' Kit said. 'We both must be thinking along similar lines.'

Gerald's face became animated. 'Will you let me know if you find him?' he asked. 'I'd love to see him. Just talk to him. Addict or not, he is my son. Our son.'

Kit nodded, biting back a tear.

They said goodbye on the doorstep of the lounge room and Gerald went to kiss her but Kit turned her head slightly so that the kiss landed on her cheek, to the right of her mouth.

'Would you like to have a coffee with me sometime?' he asked, lowering his gaze.

'I'll ring you,' she said. 'I've got rather a lot on at the moment.'

'Of course,' he said. 'Goodnight.' He looked into her eyes a second too long and Kit thought she saw something hostile as he turned and walked away.

After a moment she heard his car start up in the street, and she listened to it fade away as it turned the corner past the ringtail possum print on the road. She recalled the time seven-year-old Will had climbed up into a tree and wouldn't come down while his father railed and threatened below. Kit

had run outside, wondering what the fuss was about. And then a perfect thing had happened as Gerald realised the absurdity of the situation and was suddenly overcome by laughter. The three of them had laughed together and Will's face had been radiant.

EIGHTEEN

Dr Firestone answered her electronic door buzzer and unlocked the security gate at the foyer in Liverpool Street, letting the two women in. The entrance was small with a fake Louis Quinze mirror and table against the highly polished granite walls. They took the lift up to the seventh floor and stepped out to find Dr Firestone in slinky green satin lounge pyjamas, waiting to lead them to her apartment down the hall. Her coppery blonde hair tumbled to her shoulders. Inside her cream and beige rooms, she offered them drinks. A plate of Japanese rice savouries and peanuts waited on the low coffee table.

'It's very good of you to see me,' said Gemma. 'These are the photographs I mentioned on the phone to you.'

'I like to examine photographs,' the woman said, pouring three glasses of mineral water. 'Far less messy than crime scenes. Although I used to do a lot of them when I was younger.' She sat down on a cream lounge with Gemma and Angie opposite her. 'Are these from a recent police case?' she asked with a frown on her attractive face. 'They look somehow dated to me.' She turned them over but there was nothing on the back.

'They're thirty years old,' said Gemma, noticing that without the make-up and vivid red lips, the glasses that

the doctor reached to put on as she examined the pictures made her look like a stern headmistress.

Gemma looked at her friend and at the expert. 'They are photographs of the crime scene concerning the death of my mother. She was beaten to death with a hammer when I was five. My father has spent nearly thirty years in prison for her murder. He says he is innocent.'

Because both women were death professionals there was no comment, but the atmosphere was suddenly charged and yet there was a softness, a deference in the way Dr Firestone handled the photos that would not have been there had these been pictures of an anonymous victim.

'Thirty years is a very long sentence,' said Dr Firestone.

'Yes,' said Gemma. 'He collected an extra fifteen for being part of an attempted break-out in which a prison warden was nearly killed.'

'A very hard karma your father seems to have,' said the American, slowly studying each photograph.

'He was a doctor,' Gemma said, 'a psychiatrist.'

Dr Firestone went methodically through all the photographs, sometimes pulling one back to compare it with another, until they were all laid out in front of her. Gemma looked at her mother's upside-down and battered face, the black pools and splashes surrounding her hair still glossy in sections.

'What was the prosecution's case based on?' Dr Firestone asked.

'Bloodstain pattern interpretation,' Gemma replied. 'All circumstantial. My mother was dying when my father arrived home. But the police didn't believe him. The academic experts and the government analyst all agreed that the impact splatter was damning.'

'So your father was largely convicted on the evidence of these pictures?' Dr Firestone asked.

Gemma nodded. 'Yes. Almost entirely. The Crown witnesses argued that the bloodstain patterns on his clothes and on the walls near where my mother was struck were impact splatter.'

'What was your father's account?'

'He said that he came home at about eleven o'clock that night and found her lying on the floor. She'd been badly beaten with a hammer that was never found. The french doors onto the back garden were opened. They'd been forced with a jemmy. My father said he held her in his arms while the ambulance came and that she coughed blood onto him.' Gemma's voice faltered.

Zelda Firestone looked slowly at the pictures again, one after another. Then she started again, gathering them all up, lying them down in sequence on the table. She stood up and went to the small white kitchen that ran off the lounge room. The smell of November lilies suddenly filled the room, and Gemma turned round to see an extravagant arrangement of them in a large blue vase behind her. They reminded her of the arrangement she'd given to the Ratbag. Dr Firestone came back into the room, bringing more ice for the mineral water in a bowl. Again, she sat opposite the two younger women, sifting through the pictures. From a drawer, the expert drew out an elegant magnifying glass on a long gold chain. Gemma became aware of how hard her heart was beating as the woman continued to study the crime scene photographs, sometimes with the glass, sometimes without.

'I can't believe this,' Dr Firestone finally said. 'I can't believe that no one has noticed. And it doesn't even need magnification to be observed.' She put the gold-rimmed glass down.

'Believe what?' Gemma asked. 'Notice what?'

Dr Firestone looked her straight in the eye.

'That this blood is already clotting.' She shook her head. 'This is basic stuff. Even a non-expert can see this quite clearly.' She took a close-up photograph of the bloodstains and spots on the left sleeve and shoulder of a man's jacket and turned it to face Gemma. Gemma's heart started beating hard.

'Look at this.' The varnished red nail indicated a series of bloodstains in the form of spots on the fabric. Gemma frowned, concentrating. All she could see were small greyish circles, each with a black spot in the centre.

'What does that mean?' said Gemma, wanting to hear the expert say it, the implication already rising and cheering her racing heart even as she spoke.

'When fresh blood strikes a fabric like this,' said the doctor, 'it is absorbed instantaneously. It sinks into the fabric as it falls on it, and in a uniform way because the red cells are still freely moving in suspension in the blood. But once clotting starts, the cells start grouping together – to flocculate – and you get this.' She tapped the tiny black nuclei in the centre of each bloodstain. 'The blood is already starting to separate into plasma and blood solids. That's what makes those black centres. Fresh blood simply doesn't behave like this.'

Gemma stared at her. *Fresh blood doesn't behave like this.* The words filled her mind so that she had to concentrate on paying attention to the American's voice.

'I would say,' said Dr Firestone, 'from my experience, that this blood has been forming clots for at least twenty minutes – maybe as long as an hour. It was clotted blood your mother coughed up, which proved she must have been attacked before your father arrived.'

A thrilling sense of excitement caused Gemma to press her lips together, frightened she'd unprofessionally laugh out loud or start to sob. My father, my father, she heard herself say silently somewhere deep within. What you have always said is the truth. Someone else had done this to your wife at least twenty minutes before you found her. You are my good father after all. My good father in his Glebe garden flat. All she could hear now was the beating of her own blood in her ears.

Dr Firestone was sorting through the photographs with her red varnished nails, pushing them around like pieces in a game, placing them in different groups on the table. She leaned back in her chair and looked up at Angie and Gemma. 'And you say your father was convicted on the evidence of these bloodstains?' she asked in her American drawl.

'Yes,' said Gemma. 'The police witnesses said the blood-staining could not have occurred in any other way than during the attack.'

'You see,' said the doctor, leaning back in her seat but keeping her eyes on the pictures, and taking a sip of her glass of ice, 'already I can see that there were at least two, possibly three separate events that caused blood to be laid down. That is, three different times when bleeding occurred. These stains here,' she indicated a fan-shaped mark on the wall, 'are consistent with the first arterial splatter, the first blows. The heart pumps very strongly, especially when there is fear and terror involved.' Her eyes behind the glasses looked straight at Gemma. 'When there is an injury to an artery, blood spurts in much the same way as when you turn the hose on. But in systolic squirts, not in a steady stream.' She pointed to the fan-shaped stains against the wall and found more pictures of them among one of the piles into which she'd separated the prints.

'This is the first event in which bleeding occurred. There are two others that I can see, making three in all. Most of the specialised knowledge of blood dynamics has happened only in the last ten or fifteen years, well after these photographs were taken and conclusions drawn from them. Investigators feel they can comment on evidence like this simply because it's so visible and familiar. But without specialised training, they should never give testimony. No one should. This is a highly refined area of expertise. Back home, I've had country police officers tell me absurd things about bloodstain interpretation. They'd never dream of attempting to interpret other specialist evidence like DNA or ballistics. But because they're in and out of bloodstained premises all the time, familiarity makes them think they can interpret easily.'

'So,' said Gemma when she remembered to breathe and could speak again, 'what you're saying suggests that my father was telling the truth.'

'The patterns I see here certainly back up his version of events. If you look here, you'll see for yourself once you know what to look for. See these stains on the wall.' She pointed to one of the photographs and Gemma leaned over to see the bloodstains on the wall whose fanned-out shapes had earlier reminded her of palm trees leaves. 'You can quite easily see that there has been some overlapping. For that to happen, the first stains must have started drying out before the next layer was laid down. This means at least two events have caused that bleeding. And probably a third.'

'The actual attack,' said Gemma excitedly, 'and then when my father moved her again half an hour later. And then the ambulance officers.'

'That explanation would be consistent with these stains,' said Dr Firestone. 'It looks like arterial spurting in both cases. After the attack, as the victim—' She hurried on. '—as your

mother lay unconscious on the floor, the blood could have started clotting and then been disturbed when she was moved, causing it to flow through the clotting and spurt again. I can see evidence of a third event. Possibly when she was being stretchered by the paramedics as you've suggested.'

Gemma's heart was racing. Her mother and father filled her mind, the one bleeding terribly, the other innocent. She covered her mouth with a hand as fierce feelings spun her mind around.

'If you let me have copies of these pictures,' said Dr Firestone, 'I can do a full report when I get home to my records. We can discuss my fee later. It won't be prohibitive. This is the sort of case I really like to get my teeth into. Too many people are convicted by ignorance.'

'I want to reopen my father's case,' said Gemma. 'Your opinion will support our application. I'll courier copies over to you tomorrow,' she promised. She had to stand up, unable any longer to contain the powerful feelings that surged through her. She wanted to be alone, to go to the gym, to run from Tamarama to Bondi, to shout, to jump up and down and say, 'He didn't do it. My father is innocent. He always said he didn't do it and he didn't. I am not the child of my mother's murderer. I am not tainted. I am good, good, *good* and so is he!'

'Are you all right?' said Angie, and Gemma realised that tears were running down her face.

'I am,' she said. 'I'm very all right. This is wonderful news.'

Dr Firestone gathered up the photographs and passed them to Gemma. 'It must come as a great relief,' she said. 'To know that your father's account is supported by these pictures. Physical evidence doesn't lie. It can't perjure itself. The only thing that can go wrong is human failure to interpret it.'

Dr Firestone pressed them to stay for coffee, which they could now smell deliciously perking in the white kitchen, but Gemma wanted to go to Kit's and Angie looked at her watch, thinking of Dreamboat. Gemma pulled out a tissue and blew her nose.

On the way down in the lift, Angie put an arm around her friend. 'Take it easy, eh?' she said. 'Be careful driving home.'

But Gemma didn't drive home; she went straight to her sister's place. Kit let her in and Gemma could see she'd been crying.

'What is it?' she asked as they sat down at the kitchen table.

'Gerald was here a while ago. It was difficult. And then it was even more difficult in the silence after he left. I'm glad you came, Gemfish.'

'I'll put on the kettle,' said Gemma and she did, then turned to face her sister. 'I've just come from one of the world's most renowned experts on bloodstain interpretation. I showed her the photographs of our mother's crime scene. She said that the stains support our father's account of what happened that night. She's taken copies and will fax me a detailed report.'

Behind her, the kettle started to make the white noise of pre-boiling. Kit stared. Her eyes, freshly washed with tears, looked enormous in the clear light of the kitchen.

'Our father was telling the truth,' Gemma finally said. 'All the time he was telling the truth and he's spent thirty years – wasted thirty years of his life – in a stinking prison for a terrible thing that someone else did. Steve said he'd give a copy of the statement to the Scan expert.' She stopped. 'I'll have to follow that through now,' she said and Kit didn't notice the sadness in her voice.

'But the evidence,' Kit was saying. 'The impact splatter. That's what they all said, the experts.'

Gemma shook her head. 'Dr Firestone said that she could read three separate events where bleeding had occurred. Three, Kit. It's not just a case of one impact splatter stain.'

Now the kettle was whistling shrilly and Gemma turned it off, opening cupboards, getting out the instant coffee, the sugar, the milk. It felt as if their roles were suddenly reversed, that she was the competent, older, wiser sister, with Kit the younger and more naive.

'Don't you see, Kit? It's what our father always said. That he got blood on him when he cradled her in his arms. That was the second pattern Dr Firestone could see. She even mentioned a third that may relate to when our mother was stretchered.'

Kit still stared. The colour had drained from her face. 'I don't know what to say,' she said. 'I don't know what to think.'

'A most dreadful injustice has happened,' said Gemma. 'That's what's happened. And we must do everything in our power to clear our father's name.' She stood up. 'And to sue for compensation.'

Kit leaned over the sink as the enormity of this new information started to become clear to her. 'But for thirty years, I've believed that he did it. I've hated him for it.' She straightened up and looked at her younger sister. 'This is too much for me to take in just at the moment.'

'I'm going for compensation,' said Gemma. 'How could you calculate a leading psychiatrist's earning capacity? And more importantly, how do you possibly recompense a man for half of his lifetime? What amount of money could make up for that? Five million dollars? Ten million dollars? A

hundred million?' Gemma picked her coffee up then put it straight down again, unable to drink it.

'It was interesting,' she said after a pause, 'to look through the notes made by the original investigating detective, Philip Hawker. He must have been quite a thorough man. He interviewed one of our father's patients. A fellow called Arik Kreutzvalt.'

Kit frowned then blinked. 'I think I can even remember that name.' She turned away, thinking. 'I think he came to the house once,' she said, again looking at Gemma. 'And I think there was some drama about it.'

'There might have been,' said Gemma. 'Because our father even made a house call to him the day of our mother's death.' She stood up. 'Hell,' she said. 'It's all so long ago now. Let's come back to the present. Hey, Kit. Let's ring him,' she said. 'Let's tell him the good news. We'll tell him that we're going to do whatever it takes to get him pardoned. Recompensed. Whatever. We'll write a book called *Justice Nightmares*. Come on, let's ring him.'

But Kit shook her head. 'Not just now, Gemma. I need some time to digest this. Let it percolate in me for a while. Can we leave it till tomorrow morning?'

Gemma sipped her coffee. 'What's another night after thirty years?' she laughed.

Kit turned and looked at her, leaning against the counter, her arms folded. 'You see,' she said, 'the awful thing for me is that I still don't really want to see him. Innocent and all. I remember too much.'

After Gemma had gone home, Kit was too agitated to sleep. She sat outside in the garden for a while, but couldn't settle. The moon was bright so she opened the gate in the back wall and stepped down onto the pathway that led around

to Gordon's Bay, smelling the salt from the dim surf rolling in beneath her. In the moonlight, she could see the outlines of the fishing boats drawn up on racks above the tiny beach as she walked a little way along the path to where it became timber decking. She wasn't entirely comfortable about this moonlit ramble, thinking of the intruder of the other night and the fact that this pathway used to be a well-known beat before it was subsumed by the more domestic traffic of couples, kids and dogs.

She leaned over the railings of the walkway, watching the endless pulsing of the Pacific against the edge of Australia. Out at sea, the long, dark shape of a container ship lit with lights slid along the horizon, discernible because of the molten effect of moonlight on water. It seemed that her whole world had gone through a hundred and eighty degree turn. The darkness of a solar eclipse had now given way to the brilliance of the noonday sun. Her father was transformed from murderer to victim, all because of some thirty-year-old photographs and the experienced eyes of an expert in the behaviour of liquid and drying blood. How am I going to approach him now? she wondered. What can I possibly say?

Even now, with him seeming to have been the victim of a terrible miscarriage of justice, I still have no feeling of love for him, she thought. I still remember the atmosphere of that house. I remember creeping round the place, praying that my mother would stay in her room and not say or do anything to antagonise him. Then the terror of hearing his study door slam open against the wall and the crash of his angry feet on the stairs because someone or something had disturbed him in his work. But surely my father has paid a terrible price already for his lack of fathering and husbanding skills?

A sound in the dark bushes closer to the water spooked

her, and she walked quickly back to the gate in the back wall, sliding the bolt behind her, locking the windows and doors of her house, sitting in meditation for a while before going to bed.

Next morning, Gemma picked her up. They'd chatted on the phone over their separate breakfasts and decided to visit their father together. Kit had gathered a little bunch of flowers from her garden and had an airtight container of scones in a bag. As they drove through the traffic, Kit wondered what she'd say and do when she saw her father. 'You'd better go in first,' she said to Gemma, 'and let him know I'm here, too. It's possible he may not want to see me.'

'Oh don't be silly, Kit. Of course he'll want to see you.' Gemma turned into Glebe Point Road and made her way down past St John's Road until she came to the street where their father had his flat. She parked opposite the old house and got out of the car. 'I'll wait here,' said Kit, getting out of the car and leaning against it, the flowers in her hand. 'You take the scones.'

Gemma did so, walking down the side of the house, through the waist-high gate that opened onto the back garden and onto the patio. Her father was sitting at a table, writing in a book, the newspaper folded next to him, sunlight shining on his silver hair. He looked up from what he was writing and closed the book, as if caught in the act of doing something naughty, and his face lit with pleasure to see her. 'My dear,' he said, 'what a lovely surprise.' He stood up and came over to her.

'There's another surprise,' she said. 'Kit's with me. And we have something to tell you.'

'Oh?' His tone sounded unsure, as if he was expecting bad news. He's been in a bloody prison so long, Gemma

thought as tears pricked her eyes, that he works on the principle that all news is bad news. 'Just a moment,' she said, dropping the container of scones on the table next to him and running back up the side of the house to bring Kit back. When they both returned, their father was sitting waiting.

Kit hesitated a moment, then stepped forward. She struggled. She couldn't say 'Dad'. She couldn't say 'Father'. She took a deep breath. 'I want to apologise to you,' she said, looking directly into his eyes. 'It appears I've been wrong in my opinion all these years. Gemma had a bloodstain expert look at the crime scene photographs and, according to her, your account of what happened that night is accurate.'

Their father waited, immobile, sitting like a statue with the morning sun gleaming on his hair and forehead. 'That's what I've always said,' he snapped. He was not gracious in victory, Kit couldn't help but notice.

'That's what we've both come over to tell you,' Gemma raced on, not noticing her father's manner. 'It's wonderful news. I'm going to apply for a Section 475 inquiry and submit Dr Firestone's new findings.'

The shocked stiffness that seemed to freeze their father's body held him for a few more seconds, then Kit noticed the thaw. 'Oh that,' he said uneasily.

Gemma looked at Kit. 'What do you mean "that"?' she asked. It was then that she noticed how he slumped in the chair like an old man.

'We've got sufficient grounds here for your case to be reopened, for you to clear your name,' Gemma said. 'Quite apart from that, you're looking at a possible settlement of millions of dollars. It's the least the state can do for you. And you said on the phone just how much it would mean

to you, that you could—' Her voice trailed off. It seemed foolish and sad to believe that he'd once said he'd like to leave them money like a good father does. It was foolish of *her*. She blinked furiously, aware that her eyes had filled.

Their father sat looking down at the closed book he'd been writing in. He coughed and cleared his throat. 'I've been thinking about that,' he said, slowly getting up from the table, and Kit noted how stiff he'd become. 'You should know that I've had a bit of a change of heart about that.'

There was a flatness in his voice that alerted Kit. 'Please be clear,' she said, 'and tell us what your change of heart is all about.'

He stood there with the table in front of him, like a defence, looking first at one then the other. 'You see,' he said, 'I'm not sure any more whether that's the right way to go. To go back into all that again.'

Gemma stared in disbelief. She looked around at her sister with eyes that were as big as Kit's had been the night before. 'All that again!' she repeated in disbelief. 'What are you talking about? We talked about this only a little while ago. You were passionate about it! What's happened? Something must have happened to change you so completely.' She felt Kit put a hand softly on her arm.

'Nothing's happened,' he said, querulous. 'It's a lot of work, a lot to do at my age. A lot of raking over old coals.'

'At your age indeed! And what raking? You don't have to do anything,' said Gemma. 'I'll do it all. I'm already doing it all!' Her eyes blazed with anger and disappointment and she felt Kit's hand tighten on her.

'I've been thinking a lot about it, about the past,' their

father said, looking down and fiddling with the corner of the book he'd been reading. 'I don't want it all dragged up again. Everyone's forgotten about it. No one remembers. No one cares. I'm just an anonymous man of nearly seventy these days. If we push for an inquiry, the story will be all over the papers again. I'll be photographed, hunted by the press. You know what they're like. I just realised that it was a good dream while I was in gaol. It kept me going. But now that I'm out, I don't want to go through it all again. Besides, I want to write up my research papers. I've been saving all this stuff for thirty years in storage.' He indicated the open door of the flat and Gemma looked in. She could see boxes and cartons piled up in the hallway; more of them were just visible through the opened curtains of her father's bedroom window.

'But Dad!' Gemma almost stamped a foot. 'I can't believe I'm hearing this. Think what it would mean to us!' She turned away, not wanting to even look at him right now.

Kit stepped forward. 'Here,' she said to him. 'I brought you these from my garden.'

'That's very good of you, Kit,' he said and she came right up close to him and looked him in the face while she gave him the tiny colourful nosegay.

'They're pansies,' she said, 'and the very last of the snowdrops and that wonderful scarlet geranium. You can put them in a little vase or a jar if you haven't got a vase.' Behind her, she was aware of Gemma, standing in shock. She turned round to her sister. 'Come on, Gems,' she said. 'Let's go. We've got things to do.'

'Um, I wonder,' their father said, pausing as they turned back to him. For a second, a high and youthful hope filled Gemma's heart. It was going to be all right. He was about to say, 'I wonder if I'm not making a terrible mistake, dropping

my case like this.' Instead, what he said was shocking. 'Would you two, between you, be able to come up with a sum of money? A thousand dollars? I hate having to ask.'

Gemma was stunned, and it was Kit who answered. 'Yes, I think we could do that. We'll sort it out somehow.'

They left their father still standing awkwardly near the table and Kit steered Gemma back to the car. 'I can't believe this,' Gemma kept saying as she got into the car. Kit slid in on the other side. Gemma banged on the steering wheel. 'Damn him! He can't just do this now. What's made him change his mind?' she said, almost crying in frustration. 'And then he's got the nerve to put the fucking bite on us!'

Her sister looked across at her. 'Gems,' she said, 'you've got to let it go. It's his business. His life, after all.'

Gemma started up the car. 'But I've already started working on it,' she said. 'I've got new evidence. I've got an internationally renowned expert who will say that the blood was already clotting when my father got it on his clothes. This can only mean that his story is true. He'll be pardoned. He'll be an honourable man again.' She turned back onto Glebe Point Road, heading south, narrowly missing a young woman in purple and black velvet whose ears, eyebrows and lips were adorned with silver rings. 'Not to mention,' she said angrily, 'a bloody fortune in compensation. He could be rich *and* clear his name.'

'Maybe,' Kit said, 'that's more important to you, Gemma, than it is to him.'

Gemma drove in angry silence, taking the turns too fast, braking at the last moment, swearing at other unwitting users of the road. 'He talked to me about leaving us a lot of money,' Gemma said as they drove along Anzac Parade. 'As if it was

really important to him. That *we* were important to him. He said he wanted to be a decent father to us after all this time. So why does he do this now after all he said?' She was suddenly furious. 'It's still his fucking *work* that's the important thing. Even now, his bloody ego still wants to be published as the great doctor, humanity's benevolent helper. He doesn't want to do the other book. He doesn't care about his daughters. He doesn't care about us! And then he's got the cheek to go and put the bite on us. I haven't *got* any money. I'm running at a loss at the moment. I've had one big deposit cheque in the last month and that's paying my people's salaries. After that, I don't know what's going to happen unless business picks up. Then he goes and pulls a stunt like he did just then.'

'I know, I know,' said Kit. 'It's awful. I feel angry too, and I don't have your investment in the situation.' She paused as Gemma angrily shifted gears, over-revving the car. 'I'll send him the money,' she said. 'Don't worry about that. I still have some put away from the sale of the house. I haven't got anywhere near enough to buy anything so I might as well let him have some. I must owe him some sort of debt after all these years of believing he killed our mother.' She looked out the window at some children playing on the footpath. 'Gems, I went up really close to him when I gave him those flowers,' she said. 'I looked right into his face, his eyes—' She stopped.

'And?' Gemma said in a clipped angry voice, pretending she didn't care at all.

'And I saw what was there.'

'Tell me!'

Kit turned to her sister. 'His eyes were full of fear.'

'Fear! What could *he* possibly fear?' Gemma turned the wheel hard. 'He's got nothing to lose and everything to

gain. Now he's off and running with another project. What could he fear?'

They drove in silence until Gemma turned into Kit's street and pulled over outside her place.

'Do you want to come in?' Kit asked her, but Gemma shook her head.

'I'm too pissed off,' she said. 'I'd be awful company. I'll call later when I've calmed down.'

'Okay,' said Kit, and Gemma barely acknowledged her sister, swinging back out onto the road again and taking off.

There was still no Taxi waiting for her near the front door, nearly tripping her as she came inside. She flung her coat and keys on the hall table, grabbed a fruit juice from an almost empty fridge, cursed when she realised she'd have to go shopping in a major way soon, and took the drink out onto the deck. It was a perfect spring day with fluffy white clouds in a light blue sky over a deep blue sea. She sat scowling at the horizon until something dawned in her mind. For behaviour to change, she remembered, reality has to change. Just as something had changed in the killer's life to change his MO, something had changed in her father's life and whatever it was, its reflection had caused him to make a complete about-face. She almost rang Kit but decided she'd try working this one out by herself. Under all the agitation in her mind, the memory of Steve's rejection of her stung and she suspected that this was a contributing factor to the emotional turbulence concerning her father. She wanted to pick up Taxi and squeeze his lovely, comforting plumpness, make him grunt. She tossed the remains of the fruit juice over the rails into the garden and went into her office, hearing the two-way crackle into life.

'Tracker Two to base, copy please.'

She pressed the two-way and spoke. 'Yes, Noel, go ahead.'

'I've got the works on that driver who's been stealing fuel,' said Noel. 'He came in at three bloody am this morning. I've got it all on video, so will you ring the insurance people and organise a private viewing?'

'We'll need to bring the cops in on this,' she said.

'Bob Blackett at Parramatta detectives.' Gemma grabbed a pen and scribbled down the number that Noel gave her. 'He knows all about it. The cops have had their eye on this bloke for a while.' Gemma underlined the Parramatta detective's name on her notepad.

'That means,' said Gemma, 'that you'll have to stay on him.'

'I know, I know,' said Noel. 'It's all part of the job. If it's not sitting on this bunny it's another one. Oh,' he said, 'I've picked up the cameras we'll need for the Cross Weld job. When do you want to do that?'

Gemma glanced at her diary and slammed it shut. 'What about this afternoon,' she said. 'I'll phone him and tell him.'

It was good, she thought, to have plenty to be getting on with. It took her mind off the deep disappointment and bewilderment about her father, the sadness about Steve. And the growing fear that this time Taxi was gone for good.

But it didn't work for long, and after a little while she found herself connected to the Internet, punching in the phone number on the little scrap of dirty paper from Steve's wheelie bin. She had a program, Ozziefone, that worked like a back-to-front phone book. 'Number not listed' said her screen. Damn, she thought. A silent number. The next step would cost her over a hundred dollars *and* was illegal, but in a world where information is worth money, corruption

is inevitable; in certain cases, she liked to think, almost necessary. She made another phone call to the man she called her 'Communications Adviser' and passed the unlisted number over to him. She arranged to meet him at the Duke of Marlborough that night.

NINETEEN

Kit sat in the kitchen, working on her letter to Will. 'My dear son', she'd written.

This letter is to tell you how deeply I regret the way I wasn't available to you when you were growing up and especially during those difficult early adolescent years. I thought that feeding you and washing your clothes, fussing about your school grades, arguing with you, nagging you about homework and discussing books with you was relationship. I've learned a lot over the last few years since you went away and I've learned that real relationship is *acceptance of the other*. I was always pushing you, wanting you to 'do well'. I couldn't accept you the way you were. No wonder kids suicide. I know from my own experience with your father how dreadful it must have been for you to have no one you could talk to – really talk to. And no one who could listen to you. One day, maybe you will trust me enough to tell me how it was for you. I regret this failing of mine more deeply than I can say and I ask for your forgiveness. I love you dearly.

The tears came as she signed 'Mum' and folded it up in

an envelope, writing his name in block letters on the front. Then she propped it up near the shopping list she'd made for herself. She was going to drive up to Arcadia to buy water lilies for the pond, punnets of white petunias to plant in the garden and large terracotta pots for lavender cuttings she'd been striking. She wanted to make her father a large pot of flowering annuals, maybe white and lemon petunias, to add colour to the shadowy patio outside his small bedroom window at Glebe.

The huge and surprising fact of his newly revealed innocence seemed to illuminate everything around her; she would need time to allow the new information to settle into her mind. At the moment, it agitated and excited her in a way she couldn't have anticipated, like some new love affair. A heavy burden had lifted from her. Her body felt lighter. Suddenly, her heart was saying, I have a father. A father who wasn't any good at the job, but nevertheless is the father life has given me, and a man who has been treated with great injustice. Where does this leave me? What do I need to do about it? She rang Alexander and made a time to see him. She even wanted to call Gerald but checked the impulse. She could feel energy swirling through her feet, fizzing through her blood like effervescence. Finishing old business like this, acknowledging her part in her son's messy life, acknowledging the effect her father's innocence was having on her, created new energy, completions led to new beginnings, all these things, she knew, enhanced the flow of life itself. She would buy ricotta cheese and black cherries and make a pie to share with her father.

Next morning, Gemma woke to the alarm at a quarter to five, and was on the road twenty minutes later. Oh Taxi, my darling old piece of pudding, where are you? I'll start a pet

security firm in your honour. I'll locate missing animals for grieving owners. I'll charge them heaps and they'll be happy to pay. The thought brought her no joy at all.

At this hour, driving in Sydney was a breeze; no congestion on any of the major arteries. She'd had a vodka with the Communications Adviser, and when she shouted him and paid with a new hundred dollar bill, she gave him the change as well. In return, he'd passed her an envelope with an anonymous slip of paper in it and an address in Artarmon. Now she was driving across the Harbour Bridge and the east was streaked with apricot and lavender skies, the same tones reflecting in a choppy sea.

Gemma screwed up the piece of paper with the address and threw it out the car window. Don't do this, one part of her mind told another. Leave it be.

At 5.35 am, she turned into Fleming Avenue, a long, tree-lined street in leafy, quiet Artarmon. A man walking a little dog looked up as her lights swung past him and she drove the length of the street, finding 112 almost at the end. She turned the corner past the address and, further down the road, did a U-turn to retrace her route, parking across the road several houses down from the target house. Magpies warbled from the trees and she leaned back, taking a deep breath. The day was lightening visibly all around her now and she saw a man leaving the house next to 112, walk to his car, get in and turn the windscreen wipers on to smooth away the heavy dew. As the wipers cut two clean interlocking arcs on his windscreen, Gemma sat up and leaned forward because someone was coming out of 112. It wasn't Steve, but a nuggety, well-built man who walked like a cop. He also got in a car and started the engine. Then he looked over at her car and Gemma shrank as he suddenly made direct eye contact. She averted her glance, pretending to rummage

in the glovebox, willing him to go. After what seemed a long moment, she heard the sound of his car pulling away, heard him do a U-turn almost in front of her. To get a better look at her? If he was a cop, he might have developed the sixth sense that told him the woman in the car over the road was out of place.

Gemma ducked right down, leaning over to pick up a nonexistent something from the floor of the passenger seat side. When she was sure he'd gone, she straightened up. She was rattled. She started the car and drove away quickly. What if he'd seen her? What if he told Steve a woman of her description had been sitting off this place? She felt the hot flush of shame cover her face and neck. This is pathetic, she thought to herself. I'm a highly skilled professional woman behaving like a bloody stalker. Then she relaxed. Men look at women. It's part of life. It's all right, she told herself. I'm getting paranoid. She swung the car onto the Pacific Highway and drove home.

When she got there, she felt terrible, with no stomach to do anything let alone work. She put coffee on and leaned on the sink, staring out the window at the bushes and tree ferns that grew there. Now that her father had changed his mind and there was no great cause to channel emotional and physical energy into, a huge emptiness yawned within her. Everyone lets me down, even my bloody cat. Here I am, she thought, unable to make a lasting relationship with a man, and I've somehow attracted a vicious killer into my life and become involved in an investigation without even being a cop any more. I've risked the friendship with my sister in an effort to change history and save a man who turns out not to want to be saved after all. And so what do I do? Instead of getting on with my life I sit off the hiding place of a man who has made it very plain he doesn't

want to see me again, spying on his house like some obsessed school girl.

She jumped when the phone rang. Kit said she was going out for the day and would drop the letter she'd written to Will in Gemma's post box. Her sister had barely hung up when the two-way came to life.

'Tracker Three to base, copy please.'

'Come in, Spinner,' she said.

'I've just been talking to Rose Georgiou,' he said. 'Oh boy. All she'd say was that the video was "satisfactory". She'd been crying. She's a really nice lady.'

'And you're a really good surveillance operator,' Gemma said. 'Don't forget that.'

'I guess we won't be hearing any more from her,' said Spinner.

No sooner had she signed off than the phone rang. It was Angie, her voice sharp with tension. 'Come straight in,' she said. 'The killer has made contact by phone to the Perrault house.'

'*What?*' said Gemma. 'I'm on my way.' She switched the answering machine on and left the house. On the drive, she had to admit that horrible as it was, she was relieved that this new development on the Bianca Perrault case displaced her sense of disappointment and loss.

When she arrived at the Strike Force room, carefully closing the door behind her, Angie was addressing the group round the table. On the wall hung a map of the southeastern suburbs, Maroubra and Coogee, with the two crime scenes circled. 'A caller rang early this morning,' Angie was saying, nodding at her friend as Gemma took a seat. Opposite, Bruno ignored her while Colin, Garry Copeland and Sandy Mac acknowledged her presence. 'The caller asked for Amy,'

Angie said. 'Mrs Perrault thought at first it was some family friend, but when she asked who it was calling, the man said she should know, he was a blood relation. It was the way he said "blood relation" that made her realise who it was.'

Gemma felt her own run cold at the phrase. She thought of two dead women and her own slashed clothes.

'That's when she demanded to know who it was again and he hung up. The poor woman was in a terrible state. Garry thinks that this indicates not only that he's been watching the family, but that he feels he's somehow part of it,' said Angie, looking over at Garry.

He nodded to her, picked up his cue and took over. 'This sort of contact is unusual,' said the psychiatrist, 'but not unheard of in this sort of crime. He'll be taking a very lively interest in the investigation. So when you get out there, remember to brief anyone involved to keep an ear out for any person asking a lot of questions. I don't mean the usual sort of everyday curiosity questioning that we all cop in this job. But anyone who seems overly interested.' He looked back down at his notes again. 'We've also had several helpful leads from the FACE print and these are being followed up.'

Angie took over again. 'We've organised a tap on the line and the Perrault house is under twenty-four-hour surveillance. Mrs Perrault and Amy have gone into hiding at a relative's house and Mr Perrault is staying on at the family residence with police personnel in case there're more calls. If he's smart, he'll know that we're keeping an eye on things.'

'He's smart, all right,' said Garry. 'Smart, manipulative, arsey. Just because someone is a homicidal maniac, don't think for a moment he's stupid. A majority of the killers of this type turn out to have high IQs.' He let that sink in and then continued. 'The fact that he's contacted the parents of the girl he's murdered makes him a bit different from the

norm. It indicates that part of him wants to be a member of this family. I think he admires them in some way, might even know them, might have worked for them. In his sick way, he's longing for acceptance and love.'

Like all of us, Gemma thought. Except we go after it in different ways.

'What sort of police personnel have you got?' she whispered to Angie.

'Christine Saunders. And Peter Kozinski for the time being,' her friend said. 'But he'll have to come off later. We need him to help Colin with collating all the info we're getting.'

Gemma nodded, satisfied. She knew the two officers involved; Christine was a trained police negotiator.

'If he rings again,' Angie said under her breath, 'she's going to say she's Mrs Perrault's sister and do what a good negotiator does.'

'Remind me what a good negotiator does,' said Gemma.

'Listens very carefully, naturally,' said Angie. 'Restates anything the caller says to make sure she's got it right, and sees if she can get him to reveal anything more about himself and his agenda. That way, he's sure he's getting a sympathetic hearing.'

'That's nice for him,' Gemma whispered.

'It's not to be nice for him,' added Angie. 'It's to encourage him into more contact because the more contact we have, the more likely we are to be able to nail the psycho bastard.'

'What about the surveillance? Who's minding Mrs Perrault and Amy?'

'We are,' said Angie. 'This investigation is becoming political. Did you see the Commissioner on the *7:30 Report* last night?' Her voice became even lower. 'You've got good operators.'

'The best,' said Gemma, thinking of sturdy Noel and nosy Spinner.

'I want you to do some hours for me,' said Angie. 'Officially. Not just girlfriend favours. On the payroll on contract. Mates' rates?'

'I could use the business,' Gemma said, always mindful of the overdraft. 'Mates' rates,' she agreed.

'It also indicates how removed from reality our man is because of the way he goes about trying to get this,' Garry continued. 'That's why we're going through everyone who might have come into contact with the family and the girls. People who might have done odd jobs at the house; tradesmen, gardeners, that sort of thing. Mr Perrault has given us a list of names and you'll all be getting a copy of that and the breakdown of who's going out to talk to who. Plus I've printed out the profile description just to remind you all.' He tapped a pile of stapled sheets of paper. 'Please take one and read it carefully. For those who can't read we're looking for a male in his late twenties to early thirties. Possibly briefly and unsuccessfully married. More usually single. Lives either alone or with his parents. Can't get on with people. He'll have the sort of criminal record oriented toward sex and violence. Obscene phone calls, possibly rapes and other assaults. He'll have a great interest in killing things. Hunting, shooting. That sort of thing. A gun collection. Knives. He's a local to the southeastern suburbs or has lived there for some period of his life. If you turn up anyone like that who's also done some work around the place for the Perraults, we'll be extremely interested in having a serious chat with him. We're keeping an eye on one of the respondents to the first Scan questionnaire. Some of his answers were interestingly ambiguous.'

'What's his name?'

Garry consulted his notes. 'I don't have it here,' he said. 'I'll get back to you with it.'

'What about the ritual with the clothing? Where does that fit in?' Gemma asked.

Garry sighed. 'That's the bit I'm not too sure about. I can only imagine it as part of his private psychopathology. When we catch him, I'm looking forward to hearing about that. He's the sort of bloke who seems harmless and a bit pathetic on the surface. It's likely that he's overweight or unattractive. Because of the way he pounces. He's got no confidence about picking up women in bars or social settings. He could be drinking heavily now. Maybe neglecting to shave. Might have done a geographical and moved house. But he probably won't go too far while this investigation is on because he wants to keep an eye on that. He'll keep newspaper clippings, and any other references to the killings. This is his fifteen minutes of fame. He'll have a collection of sadistic pornography and he'll be talking about the killings and theorising about them to anyone who'll listen.'

'Great,' joked Colin. 'What's his phone number?'

The tension in the room was broken by the laughter.

'Okay,' said Angie. 'Do you all know what you're doing?'

'I'm still working through recent releases from prisons and psych hospitals,' said blond, blue-eyed Ian, whose movie star good looks were only slightly marred by the barest hint of a lazy eye.

'Right,' said Angie. 'When you're finished, come and see me.' She looked around. 'I'll break up this list Mr Perrault has given us by suburbs and get the local uniforms involved in the initial inquiry. Bruno, you and Sandy Mac door-knock the whole street. I want you to describe the sort of person we're interested in. I want every householder in the area thinking. Anything out of the ordinary, no matter how small, I want

reported. I want this information, no matter how wild or irrelevant it might seem to be, to get into your notebooks with a name and address attached to it and back into this room. Then I want every name that comes up to be contacted and interviewed. We've got a very bad man out there and a lot of frightened women.' She stood up, smoothing her red hair back behind a clip, and gestured to Gemma to follow her out of the room. 'We don't want all the details getting into the press yet,' she said as they walked towards her office. 'But there's something I want to tell you.'

They passed the group from the Strike Force waiting near the lifts. 'He's really something, this guy,' Gemma heard Ian say. 'He's gone through a personality change.'

'This profiling is all bullshit,' said Bruno pointedly as Angie neared. 'Just a wank from the academics. And the people who are trying to crawl up their arses.'

'On your bike, Bruno,' Angie said as the lift doors opened. When they'd closed again she turned to Gemma. 'The caller wanted to know about Amy's pyjamas.'

'Pyjamas?' Gemma stopped in her tracks. 'Whether they had teddy bears on them, too,' Angie was saying. The two women stared at each other, remembering tartan teddy bears on blue satin stuck together with Bianca's blood and the buzzing of flies.

On the drive home, Gemma's thoughts about Bianca and satin pyjamas were interrupted as her mobile rang beside her.

'I'm at the depot,' said Noel. 'We got that driver cold.' Gemma almost smiled at the excitement in his voice. 'The bust went down just a little while ago. Right now, the driver's putting his hand up for about forty thousand dollars' worth.'

'You did good, Noel,' she said. 'Take a break.' She pulled in at the kerbside, parking outside her apartment.

'Take a break?' he said. 'I'm waiting on you. You're supposed to be meeting me for the fit-out for Cross Weld.'

'Oh shit,' said Gemma, locking the car windows. 'I can't, Noel. I've got too much happening here. Can you do it alone?' She got out of the car, checked the mail box, took out a letter with unfamiliar handwriting and walked down the steps, unlocking her front door one-handedly.

There was silence at the other end of the mobile. Noel wasn't pleased about this. 'Take Spinner,' she suggested, hearing the other phone start to ring in her office. 'It's only a few cameras to install. And lights with sensors.'

'It'll take us all afternoon. Spinner wouldn't be able to join me till later.'

'Listen,' she said. 'I've got to go.' She rang off, walked into her office and put the letter on the desk. 'Mercator Business Services,' she answered the caller. Speak of the devil, she almost said. It was Richard Cross.

'I've been waiting,' he said. 'For a phone call from you.'

'A phone call?' Gemma blinked, wondering what he meant.

'A phone call,' Richard repeated. 'When a gentleman sends flowers to a lady, he hopes it'll induce her to ring him and—'

'It was *you*!' Gemma said. She thought of the beautiful arrangement she'd turned out of the house, the blue and white and gold and a whole area of worry and suspicion cleared itself up in her mind as she laughed with relief.

'I'm sure you have lots of men sending you flowers,' Richard was saying.

'No, no,' she laughed. 'That's not what I meant.' She

stopped explaining herself. 'Thank you,' she said simply. 'They were beautiful.'

'You said "were". Didn't they last?' he asked.

'Oh yes,' she said. Maybe she should go and knock on Mrs Ratbag's door. 'They're still beautiful.' She remembered the short message on the card and felt herself blush.

'I'm teasing,' he said. 'I didn't put my name on the card so I could ring up and confess. I realised you couldn't possibly know it was me.'

Gemma tried to think of something brilliant and scintillating but nothing came to mind.

'Can you make dinner tomorrow night?' he was saying. 'I know it's short notice.'

She didn't even bother with the charade of checking her diary. You bet, she thought to herself. An affair with a nice solid rich businessman with political ambitions is just what the doctor ordered. No more bloody cops. 'I'm sure I can,' she said.

'I'll pick you up at seven.'

'Yes,' she said. The pain around Steve suddenly receded. She rang off, momentarily light-hearted. It is almost indecent, she thought to herself, my romance attention span. Something Kit had said to her came suddenly into Gemma's mind and she found herself thinking of it. Whatever it is that ails a woman, Kit said, the answer is *never* a man. 'Fiddlesticks, Miss Kitty,' Gemma said out loud, going into the kitchen, suddenly ravenous. She grabbed a shiny red apple and bit into it. Juice squirted onto the table. She remembered Richard Cross's sturdy good looks and his broad shoulders, and she imagined weekends in boutique hotels, lazy afternoon lovemaking in rooms overlooking the harbour and the sun shining onto their naked bodies, champagne chilling in silver buckets. Or dawdling down to

The Rocks for dinner, walking along Circular Quay and leaning over the wrought-iron rails to look at the oily bottle green water lapping mossy pylons then the ferries reversing engines and churning the water into jade and aqua clouds.

But the empty space on the end of the old lounge where Taxi liked to curl up and pretend to be a big ginger cushion brought her back to earth. She pulled a photo of him out of its frame, glued it to a piece of paper, wrote 'Missing: desexed male ginger cat' in big black texta colour print with his name and her phone number under it, looked at it, added 'Reward' in even bigger letters and made ten photocopies. It took her nearly an hour in the car to drive around, taping them to telegraph poles at intervals, and sticking one in each of the bus shelters near the beach and one at the shops. When she got back, her street was parked out and she had to leave the car in an adjoining lane.

In her office she picked up the envelope containing the material from Philip Hawker and her father's statement. She flipped through the retired police officer's notes again and the name 'Arik Kreutzvalt' jumped off the page at her. She booted up and ran the Ozondisc program, punching the name in. The little hourglass icon came on the screen, advising her to wait. Three possibles appeared on the screen, two interstate, one at North Ryde. She scribbled down the number and address and closed the program. It was a long time ago, she realised, since her father had made that house call the day of his wife's murder. But Kreutzvalt might have something to tell her. Her mind was agitated and she knew she'd have to take a sleeping pill later on. Then she remembered the letter that had come in the mail and tore open the envelope, frowned, recognising the name

at the bottom with a start of shock. It was the signature of a dead woman. The letter ran:

Dear Miss Lincoln. Thank you for your phone messages which I collected before I left. I'd like to meet you again but I'm leaving to live with my brother in Queensland, hence this letter. I have had very bad dreams lately and I think the change of scenery will do me good.

We've already talked about the noise at the back of your house about half an hour before Dr Chisholm arrived home. But there was another incident which didn't even get into the courtroom and I want to tell you about it.

Three days before your mother's death (may she rest in peace) a very agitated man came to the front door. After some discussion, which I couldn't hear apart from the raised voices, your father let him in. I had the impression that this man was a patient. I told the police all this at the time, but although it was noted down in some constable's little notebook, it was obviously never taken into account. I have often wondered who that man was and if he came back to the house three nights later, knowing that your father would be out. Your parents had a remarkable collection of silver and it was always displayed on the sideboard in the dining room. Finally, even though you may think less of me for mentioning it, I want to say that I saw a very jagged dark red-black and brown aura around that man, something I've only seen once before in a hopelessly psychotic patient when I was a young nurse. There are angry ghosts around you. I pray for your well-being and that of your sister and hope that the dark karma that links us will unfold eventually in a perfect way. May God bless you. Imelda Moresby.

PS This will sound very odd and please don't be frightened, but I see you involved with an extremely dangerous man – a murderous man in fact. Deliverance comes in a most extraordinary way. Something small, white and lethal. And once again, it all goes in twos. I will pray for you.

There were two scribbled initials under the postscript. Gemma put the letter down. Her head was spinning. It was eerie, this letter from the dead. She poured herself a brandy. It made her angry, all this oogie-boogie stuff. What all goes in twos? Why did the woman even write it in the first place? Who was the murderous man? Did she poison him with a white pill? This is crazy, she thought. Sorry, Imelda, she said to the dead woman. I just can't deal with you at the moment. I need to make contact with someone who's real. And who's alive. Even though she still felt angry with her father, she needed to talk to him. She picked up the phone and dialled.

'Dad?'

'Yes?' His voice hesitant, frail.

'It's me, Gemma. I've just had a letter from Mrs Moresby, who used to live next door to us.'

'Yes?' he said. 'What did she want?'

'Do you know that she's dead?' She continued quickly. 'She died in a motor vehicle accident on Tuesday.'

'Is that so?' he said rather awkwardly.

Gemma had the feeling that he really didn't remember who she was talking about. 'In her letter Mrs Moresby says she remembers an incident three days before our mother was killed.' She was surprised that her voice cracked a little on the last four words. It is still unhealed, she thought, despite thirty years. That night still has power to hurt me

all the way down to this present year. 'And that's what I'm ringing about.'

'Oh?' he said. 'And what was that?' Gemma read the relevant lines to him over the phone and waited. There was a long pause. 'I don't remember that,' he said finally. 'I don't remember who that might have been. I don't really remember much about that time at all really.' He paused. 'I don't see that it matters now.' His voice sounded depressed. Something had happened to him, Gemma was sure. Kit said she'd seen fear in his eyes. There was another long silence. 'How are you getting on?' she asked, filling in the silence.

'Quite well.' His voice brightened. 'I've just had the last of my medical records and papers delivered here out of storage and I've been going through them. I'll have to find somewhere nearby to store them. Maybe a garage or something. I'm trying to organise the chapters of my book. I don't know where to start, actually. I want to write an academic text that is also personal.'

'Sounds like a contradiction,' said Gemma.

'Writing one's memoirs is a very odd experience. I keep thinking about things. About her. That marriage. I sometimes can't believe some of the things that happened. It's all so long ago now.'

'Are you talking about my mother?'

'Yes,' he said. 'I am. When are you coming over for dinner?'

She'd forgotten the earlier agreement to do just that. 'Soon,' she promised. 'Dad?' she asked again. 'Is something frightening you?' She heard a sharp little intake of breath and then his denial.

'No, no, of course not. What makes you say that?'

She heard the key turn in the lock and nearly jumped through the roof, then she saw it was Kit, coming in with

shopping bags and some flowers. 'I've got to go now. Kit's just arrived.' She rang off.

'Gems. I thought you were out,' she said. 'The car's not there. Otherwise I would have knocked. I made one of these for you and I wanted to put it in your fridge as a surprise.' Kit unwrapped a checked teatowel to reveal a black cherry and ricotta pie.

'Yum,' said Gemma. 'Thank you.' She put the dish in the fridge.

'It's a peace pie,' said Kit. 'I made one for Father, too. I've brought that letter for Will with me. Please try and get it to him somehow.' She passed it to Gemma and Gemma put the long envelope on the kitchen counter. 'Hey,' Kit said, looking around. 'Where's Taxi?'

'He's been missing for a couple of days. I think his nine lives have run out. I've just been putting posters around offering a reward.'

'Oh Gems, I'm sorry.'

'But it's not only that. Take a look.' Gemma proffered the letter from Imelda Moresby in silence and Kit read it quickly. 'What do you think?' Gemma asked as Kit handed the letter back.

'Maybe an angry patient,' she said, putting the letter down. 'Angry ghosts.' She saw what Gemma was drinking. 'You're on the hard stuff already?' she added, indicating the brandy.

'It was a shock,' Gemma said. 'To get this letter.' She went into her office and brought out Philip Hawker's notes. 'I just spoke to Dad. He said he didn't recall anyone. Had no memory of that incident about the angry man at the house. It probably wasn't – isn't – unusual,' she continued, 'for unstable patients to behave like that at their doctors' houses?' She looked at her sister.

'It's happened to me,' said Kit. 'I've had to make it very clear to one or two of my clients in the past that coming to my house outside appointment times is simply not on.'

'Can *you* remember any fancy silver?' Gemma asked.

Kit frowned. 'I think there was a very grand tea or coffee set on a tray in the dining room. Was anything reported as stolen that night?' She'd been digging around in a low kitchen cupboard and she'd found a vase. She filled it with water and put the bright red tulips she'd brought into it and carried them over to the dining table. Gemma shook her head, then went to the fridge and cut herself a generous slice of pie and put it on a plate.

'I want to tell our father,' said Kit, 'that I'm sorry about the way I've been wrong about him. And that I was always so opposed to him. And Gemma, I was wrong to oppose you for wanting to know more about him. I'm a therapist. I'm supposed to be aware that the relationship a woman has with her father is the relationship she has with "the man". And yet I couldn't see it in my own case. It was still my blind spot, despite my experience. I know saying I'm sorry is a bit weak after all the years I've damned the man, and been judgmental of you too in a way. I really am sorry, Gemma. You were right and it wasn't just the idealising child in you as I thought. Our father is innocent after all.' She paused. 'And yet,' she said, pointing to the letter, 'Mrs Moresby knows about angry ghosts.'

'What do you mean?' Gemma looked up from Philip Hawker's notes again, absent-mindedly looking round for Taxi. Then the pang of remembering his loss. She looked at her sister, the question in her eyes.

'"Angry ghosts",' said Kit, 'is an eastern term. I use it to mean energies operating in the present that have their roots in the past. Another psychotherapist might call them

unintegrated, archaic rage and pain in a person's psyche. They can create great danger in and around the person.'

'It wouldn't be from our mother,' said Gemma. 'She wouldn't harm us.'

Kit shook her head. 'It's not like being haunted,' she said. 'The energies I'm talking about are in one's own psyche. They're not caused by another person, but by our own strong feelings *about* that other person. However,' she added, 'our mother was very passive and passivity brings its own dangers.'

'What do you mean?' asked Gemma.

'What I say. A passive person creates danger by failing to take responsibility for herself.'

Do I do that? Gemma wondered guiltily. She cleared her throat.

'What time suits you?' Kit asked. 'To visit the cemetery?' Every year, the sisters visited their mother's grave on Gemma's birthday.

'Any time in the afternoon is best for me,' Gemma said.

'I can get some flowers up the street on the way.' Kit thought of how she couldn't ask her father to join them, even though she knew now he was innocent.

'I'd still like to know what's happened to change Dad's mind about clearing his name,' Gemma said.

'Have you had a chance to ask him?'

'Yes.' She shrugged. 'I didn't get anywhere.' She paused. 'Kit, there's a reference to a patient of our father's in Philip Hawker's notes. Arik someone. The ex-cop in me wants to talk to him if I can find him. Just to tidy things up. Especially after this.' She indicated the letter and stood up.

The phone rang and Gemma grabbed it. 'I was just about to ring you,' she said to Angie. 'What've you got?'

'We need your sister,' said Angie, almost talking over her. 'We've got a suspect yelling blue murder.'

'Great work,' said Gemma. 'Kit's right here with me. Who've you pulled in?'

'Good,' said Angie. 'Both of you can come down now.'

'*Who*?' Gemma repeated. 'Who are you questioning?'

'Nasty piece of work called Clive Mindell,' said her friend down the line. 'Screaming for your sister. Another one of her charming clients.'

They were met by a young constable who escorted them up to the lifts. As they stepped in, Kit turned to her sister. 'This is crazy. Clive wouldn't have anything to do with this.' The constable pressed the button and the lift heaved upwards. They stepped out and followed the young woman down the hallway, coming to a door marked 'Interview Room'.

Kit could hear Clive's voice already. 'I'm telling you,' he was saying, 'you're not listening to what I'm saying.' He turned at their entrance and his face brightened. 'Kit. Thank God you've come,' he said. 'You tell this woman. They won't believe me. Tell them I'm working on my problems. That's what I pay you a hundred dollars a week to do. So that I *don't* do the sort of thing they're suggesting. For God's sake *tell them*!' His eyes were pleading with her. He was terrified and pared right down to himself, all contrivance gone. Kit leaned towards him and put her hand on his arm. There was no hint of his usual cockiness or the careless, seductive glibness. Even Gemma could see the shock and fear in the man's eyes. There was something familiar about him that she just couldn't place.

'What problems, Clive?' said Angie, pouncing. The freckled police officer seated at the table opposite Clive muttered something and turned around to his colleague with the video

camera. They looked at the strange woman in their midst and nodded to Gemma. It was clear that a formal videotaped interview was not in progress at the moment. Clive looked haggard and exhausted, as if he'd been interrogated for hours already.

'Clive,' Kit said in a steady voice. 'Take a few deep breaths.' She saw him close his eyes and his chest expand. When he opened them, his eyes were tear-filled.

Angie leaned against the wall, staring at Clive. 'He's denying everything. Says he's got nothing to do with it. But you sure have a few things to explain, don't you, Mr Mindell?' Angie made a sudden lunge at him. 'What about the clippings, Clive?' she said, waving several long strips of newsprint at him. 'Why have you got clippings about Marcia Harding's and Bianca Perrault's deaths? Tell me.'

Kit looked at her client, frowning. This was a shock. She remembered his previous remarks in the therapy room, about the open window at Maroubra, the murdered woman. But surely not Clive, she thought. It can't be Clive. Alexander's words about the blind spot suddenly confronted her.

'You've got no right to have those,' he said. 'Your officers just barged into my place. No warrant. Nothing.'

'You must've asked them to come inside,' said Angie. 'My people do things by the book.'

'I said they could come in because I've got nothing to hide.'

'And they could hardly help it if their eyes just fell on these cuttings lying on your table.'

'That young one. Sandy someone. He was picking things up all the time saying What's this? What's that? Picking up all my private things. He had no right.'

'Why did you keep them?' Angie shoved the cuttings closer to his face.

'I've told you. I already told these men here. I collect murders. It's like a hobby.' Kit remembered his talk of the statistics of death, of which sex killed the other more frequently, of his sly pleasure in the fact that men killed more. 'If you look in the cupboard in the second bedroom at home, you'll find a whole lot of other ones, too. You're trying to put this on me. You're just putting these things together to make me look bad.'

'We don't have to make you look bad,' said Ian, walking over to the table. 'You're doing that real well yourself.' He tipped up a stiff manila envelope and a pair of lacy pink panties fell onto the table. 'What about these? Tell us the truth, Clive. How did these get in your car?'

Kit stared at the pale pink panties, shocked. She looked away, not wanting any movement on her face to be seen.

'I told you already,' Clive was saying. 'I told you I got those from the rubbish bin. They were just sitting near the top and the lid was partly opened. It's just a souvenir.'

'Hey!' Gemma said. 'It was you standing outside the Perrault house early in the morning after Bianca was abducted!' She turned to Angie. 'Remember him? The fellow Mick said he moved along?'

Clive looked even more haggard. 'You don't understand,' he said.

Angie stared at Gemma a long moment and then turned on Clive. 'We understand only too well, Clive,' she said, her voice soft and menacing. 'We understand all about souvenirs, too.' Her gleaming red head bent close to his as she hooked up the pink panties on the end of her pen and waved them at him. 'And we understand all about killers who like to take souvenirs from their victims, so they can enjoy the action replay when they haven't got a live one. And you know about that too, don't you? Whose are these, Clive?

Tell me.' She walked back to the window, the panties still dangling from her pen.

Clive swung round in his seat, pulling away from the accusing woman. 'You tell them,' he called to Kit. 'Tell them I'm working on my shit. Tell them I didn't do this. I've got nothing to do with it.' His big head and neck were puffed up, his face red, but now the energy was that of terror and frustration. Clive stared at each woman in turn, his head moving like someone at a tennis match. 'Anyway,' he said belligerently, 'if I was so busy abducting and murdering that girl, how come I was able to stand there and watch you lot?'

Angie came away from her position on the wall and pushed Ian out of the chair opposite Clive. She threw the panties back onto the table and sat down in front of him. Her face was flushed and she pushed her hair impatiently back behind her ears.

'Not difficult, Clive. Not difficult to tie your victim up somewhere nice and safe while you get more thrills watching the mug coppers.' She stood up again, smiling. 'You've walked straight out of the profile, Clive, so start talking.' Suddenly she swooped on him, her face inches from his. 'Now I'll ask you again about these panties. Souvenir of who? Souvenir from where?'

But Clive said nothing, just looked up at Kit, and she could see the deep shame in his face. 'Souvenir of *what*?' The accusation in Angie's voice was sharp and Kit could see Clive's cringe in full flight.

'Clive. I want to know where these panties came from,' Angie was insisting, her voice strident. She jabbed at the underwear.

'Shut up and leave me alone!' Clive screamed.

'It's okay, Clive,' Kit said. 'Take a deep breath and take your time. You don't have to answer till you're ready.'

'I don't have to answer at all. I'm only here because I want to be helpful.'

'Then why wouldn't you let one of our doctors take a DNA sample from you, Clive? If you're innocent it'll serve to eliminate you. We don't even have to prick you. Just a cheek cell scraping. Why did you refuse that?'

'You've got no right,' said Clive, looking as if he were about to burst into tears and putting a hand on his face as if to protect himself from any scraping. 'I'm not some *thing* you can just take pieces from.'

Angie turned to the two men near the door. 'Take him downstairs and put him in another interview room where he can have a think about all the things we already know. We know you love women's clothes already.' She fished up the panties with her pen again. 'You like to make effigies of women, don't you? Then you stab them and wank all over them!'

Clive went bright red. 'No! You're not listening. I've told you! I just took them on a stupid impulse. I saw them sticking out of the rubbish bin and I took them.'

'What bin, Clive?' Angie demanded. 'You said "*the*" bin, not "*a*" bin, Clive.' She was relentless and Clive pulled himself upright in his chair, looking as if he had to brace himself against her, as if she were a gale force wind. 'Your language indicates to me that you have a bin in your mind. It means a particular bin you know, Clive. Not just any random bin. Which bin, Clive? *Whose* bin?'

But again he shook his head, refusing to answer, and Kit noticed that under pressure the cringe had gone, suddenly replaced with arrogance.

'I'm not going to answer any more of these stupid questions,' he said, purpling in the face. 'I've told you everything I know.' He looked at the expensive watch on his

wrist. 'And I've been here four hours.' Kit watched the way his energy seemed to come back into him, puffing him up, swelling him into his domineering persona. 'I know enough about the law to know that you can't keep me any longer than that unless you charge me.'

Angie pushed backwards in the chair with disgust and stood up. 'Take him downstairs and make him a cup of tea.'

'Stuff your cup of tea,' said Clive, standing up. 'You have to let me go and you know it.'

'How come you know so much about the law, Clive?' said Angie, out of her chair now and moving intimidatingly close. 'Ordinary blokes don't have a clue about this sort of thing. It changes all the time. Even I don't know sometimes. How come you've made sure you're up to date? That's the sort of information that only lawyers keep in their heads.' She swung round on him. 'Or crims.' She turned to Kit. 'A word,' she said to her, jerking her head at the door. 'Outside.'

'Don't listen to her, Kit,' Clive was saying as Angie closed the door. The two women stood in the corridor.

Angie's face was flushed. 'If you'd just say that he's potentially dangerous,' she said, 'I've got more of a chance to extend the time we're allowed to keep him.'

'Angie, that's an impossible ask. I'm here because one of my clients asked for me. Not to make things easier for the police.'

'How long's he been seeing you?' she asked Kit. 'At least you can tell me that much.'

'A few months.'

'What for?'

'That's confidential, Angie.'

'Then let me tell *you*. His marriage has busted up,' Angie said, placing her right index finger on the little finger of

her left hand, then moving to the next, ticking each point off. 'He's seeing you because of low self-esteem, a sense of alienation and isolation, the failure to make good, long-term relationships with women, a difficult relationship with his mother, maybe he can't get it up.' She flung her hands apart, having run out of fingers. 'Oh, and a miserable childhood. How am I doing?' She raised her eyes to the ceiling. 'People like him have miserable childhoods because they're miserable mongrel bastards, that's why. Right from the start.'

'My feeling,' said Kit, not reacting to Angie's comments, 'is that Clive isn't involved in something like this. He wouldn't be acting out homicidally.'

'How can you *say* that?' said Angie. 'You of all people. I remember a client of yours. That dropkick with the kid in the bath? *He* was prepared to kill himself and the baby and *he* was seeing you. What makes you confident enough to say that Clive Mindell isn't a homicidal maniac?' Angie's cat-eyes narrowed with anger and her neck and face flushed. 'He's got clippings related to these murders. He's even carrying some of them on him! Then we find these panties tucked away in his car.'

Kit shook her head. 'I can't make any comment about the panties,' she said. 'Obviously, there are things he wouldn't even tell a therapist about. All I can say is that Clive is not the same as Adrian Adams. Who *discontinued* therapy, remember? Clive is a completely different character.'

'Oh really?' said Angie.

'Really,' said Kit, bringing her voice down deliberately. 'Clive has been working on certain problems with me. He's had some very helpful insights into himself in a way that Adrian never did. And he saw these things for himself. I didn't tell him,' Kit said.

'What problems?' Angie pounced. 'If it comes to it, we can *subpoena* your case notes, Kit. We can find out.'

Kit looked squarely at Angie, measuring her up as she felt herself come up against the strength and power of the other woman for the first time.

'I don't know what things are coming to round here these days,' said Angie. 'I bring a dickhead like this in for questioning and he's got to have a therapist with him! Then we waste over an hour trying to find you.'

'Angie, I know Clive Mindell better than you and I can say that it's very unlikely he's your man,' said Kit. 'A man who voluntarily seeks the sort of therapy I can offer and keeps coming back is demonstrating to me that he is changing. Killers don't do therapy. They act out instead to avoid the very feelings of shame and powerlessness that come up in therapy. That Clive is working on.'

'I'll bet I can find a killer who was under psychiatric care when he killed,' said Angie, her concentrated anger narrowing her eyes.

'Maybe,' said Kit. 'But my work isn't the same as psychiatry. And I'm not talking in general terms. I'm talking of Clive.'

'But you admit that violence *is* a possibility with him?' Angie pounced again.

'He's never mentioned any violent acting out.'

'Fantasies?'

'Come on now,' said Kit, getting angry, remembering Clive's reverie about himself and a prostitute. 'That's unfair. There's a *huge* difference between fantasy and reality.'

Angie glared at her. 'Not for this killer there isn't.' She swung the door open and strode back into the room. Clive jumped, startled in his chair. Angie turned to Gemma. 'Talk some sense into your sister.'

Gemma half lifted her hands from the back of the chair she was standing behind. 'It's not—' She faltered. 'I can't put pressure on Kit, Angie. She knows her position.'

Angie grabbed her notebook and pen from the table. Her face was hard and unsmiling. She glared at Clive, who visibly wilted under her green-eyed assault. 'Okay, Clive,' she said. 'You can go. Sandy, walk him down.'

Clive looked around like a hunted animal, then, seeing that he really could go, shot out of his seat. 'I need to talk to you, Kit,' he said, turning at the door. 'They've treated me very badly here. Accusing me of terrible things. Trying to frighten me. Threatening to take DNA samples. I'm going to put in a complaint.'

Kit was aware of Angie catching her eye, indicating that she'd better stay. 'I'll come straight down,' Kit said to him as he left the room. 'Soon as I'm finished here.'

Angie threw her pen into her black leather briefcase with frustration, not looking at the two other women in the room. She swung over to the window, pushing her recalcitrant hair back and this time pinning it. 'Why wouldn't you help me out, Kit?' she demanded. 'This fellow's all wrong. Everything points to him. I just needed a little more time and he would've cracked.'

'I can't do that to a client,' said Kit. 'There's no reason for you to understand the way I work, but that sort of betrayal is simply not possible. I regret your position.'

'You regret *my* position!' Angie blazed. 'What about yours? What about when this killer strikes again? Think about that, Kit. How are you going to feel then?'

Kit didn't respond and Angie flung away from the window and swept her notebook and pen up from the table, stuffing them into her briefcase. 'He's right,' she said. 'We haven't got enough to charge him at the moment. Any lawyer would

just laugh at us. And we can't keep him any longer without a bail magistrate's say-so.' She looked accusingly at Kit before continuing. 'We haven't got a damn thing to put him at the scene of the crime. Or crimes.' She picked up the panties and put them back in the manila envelope. 'Take those over to the Institute,' she said, passing them to Colin. 'Tell them it's urgent. We might get something.' Colin took the envelope and left the room.

Sandy Mac suddenly put his head around the door. 'I've got a package for you. Can you sign for it?' Angie snatched the package from him and scribbled her name, ripping it open, pulling out a letter and two other pages. She suddenly looked up. 'Where's Bruno?' she asked him.

Sandy shrugged. 'Who knows?'

'I need to. See if he's in his office, will you?' Sandy disappeared, then she turned her attention to the contents of the manila envelope from the Institute of Forensic Medicine. Kit saw two pieces of paper, each showing a graph plotted to reveal a series of coloured peaks.

'Here's the DNA profile of the Maroubra killer,' Angie said, poking a finger at the first graph.

Bruno suddenly appeared at the door. 'You wanted me?' he asked Angie as if it were a huge imposition.

'Yes,' she said, flipping through her notes to Clive Mindell's address. She quickly scribbled it on a piece of paper. 'I want you to sit on this man. I want to know when he goes out and where he goes to. And I want you to keep in touch. You seem to have a habit of disappearing all the time.'

Bruno snatched the piece of paper out of her hands and went out, slamming the door.

'Charming,' said Angie. 'Now, let's have a look at these.' Beside the first graph, she lay the second. 'That's the profile

of the Tusculum Hotel wanker.' She looked at Gemma. 'Your little mate,' she added, standing back to let the other two women see. Gemma stared. She'd expected it, but actually seeing the two identical charts plotted from the two samples made her weak at the knees. Angie pointed to them. 'Now,' she said, 'all we need is a sample from Clive to match up with these and I reckon I've got the bastard.' There was a silence.

'It won't be him, Angie,' said Kit.

'You can't say that.'

'What did he say when you questioned him before I came in?'

'He just denied everything,' said Angie.

'As you would if you hadn't done it,' said Kit.

'And as you would if you had,' said Gemma reasonably. 'And if you weren't interested in doing twenty years for it.'

Kit looked across at her sister; she was feeling outnumbered. She turned back to Angie. 'You didn't get your sample from him. He wouldn't let you.'

Angie flashed a fast, smart smile. 'A sample's on its way to the Institute already,' she said, looking at her watch. 'And it should be going into the differential extractor about now.' She looked at Kit, enjoying her bewildered expression. 'We took a swab from his steering wheel when we picked him up earlier.'

'Is that legal?' asked Kit.

'Sure,' said Angie. 'If you drop something you don't want and I pick it up, what's the illegality in that? People are always shedding bits and pieces of themselves. On steering wheels, toothbrushes. We just pick it up. Organised a nice parking space for him downstairs. Only had to lean in the window.'

Kit finally broke the tense silence. 'I'm going home,' she said, walking to the door. 'You don't need me any more.'

Angie shrugged. 'Whatever,' she said.

'It's not Clive, Angie,' Kit said. 'I know him. We're making real progress.'

'Who are you trying to convince, Kit, me or you?'

There was a silence. Finally Gemma spoke. 'Kit knows her business, Angie. What she says needs to be taken into account.'

'Thank you, Gemma,' said Angie, exasperated, looking from one to the other. 'You two sisters. You're a pair, you are. Both so different but thick as thieves.' She shook her head.

Gemma suddenly looked up as a light went on in her mind at Angie's speech. Mrs Moresby's words came back to her. 'This all goes in twos.' *Both so different, thick as thieves.* The incomprehensible puzzle that had been bothering her about the inconsistencies in both the crime scenes and the offender shifted a little. Maybe there was a way to make it comprehensible.

Kit went to the door and opened it, but before she could leave Angie spoke. 'On your way home, Kit, just remember this. It's not the first time a client of yours has demonstrated homicidal tendencies.'

'It's not Clive,' Kit said, turning back to face Angie.

'I just hope you're right. Because if you're not,' said Angie, 'a sadistic murderer just walked out of this room.'

Kit kept walking: out the door, down the hall. Behind her, she heard the door open again and Angie calling down the corridor after her, 'And you helped him walk!'

TWENTY

At Kings Cross Police Station, Gemma leaned across the counter. An impossibly dainty blonde, barely five foot tall with tiny pearl earrings in each ear and pale pink lipstick, turned from some paperwork. The large black Glock in its holster seemed incongruous off her narrow waist, and Gemma couldn't help wondering what she'd be like in a street brawl.

'Yes, ma'am, can I help you?'

'Greg McGovern around?' she asked.

'And you are?' the young constable asked.

'I'm a classmate of his. We went to cop school together. Gemma Lincoln.'

'Just a moment.' She vanished and Gemma waited. Behind her, an elderly woman in a black woollen coat and scarf and with the sunken face of generations of suffering sat huddled in the corner. Gemma smiled as Greg appeared. There was an instant when he didn't remember her, and then he did and his face opened into its cautious smile.

'Hey,' he said. 'Good to see you. Come in.'

She followed him through the partitions and offices until they came to his room. 'Excuse the mess,' he said automatically. 'Take a seat. I can't offer you a coffee because the hot water system blew up this morning.' Gemma sat

opposite him and Greg leaned back comfortably in his chair. 'How's the security business?'

Gemma grimaced. 'You know. Like life. Has its ups and downs.'

Greg sat forward. 'I wouldn't mind getting out,' he said. 'Things are very different from how they were when we came through. I sent two of the young fellers down to Wollongong a little while back to have a serious chat with this bloke we wanted to talk to in relation to a break and enter. I told them to bring him back with them. He's one of our old-time crims. He knows the story. But when they came back, there's no bloke. So where is he? I say. Couldn't you find him? Oh no, they tell me. We found him all right. But he said he didn't do it. So we came back.' Greg paused, shaking his head. 'They say sorry for troubling you sir and they come back. He said he didn't do it. Can you believe it?'

'Very different from the old days,' said Gemma.

'Well, maybe I can help you at least. What brings you here?' he asked finally.

'I'm looking for someone,' she said. 'My nephew, actually. He's been living around the Cross for the last three years. He's an addict. His mother wants to get a letter to him.'

'What's his name?'

'Will Westlake.'

Greg got up and walked to the door of his room and put his head out. 'Any of you wankers heard of a Will Westlake?'

'Yes,' a female voice called and the pretty young constable walked in. 'He's been hanging around the Wall. Got himself beaten up the other day.'

Gemma felt her heart contract. Beautiful Will, Kit's darling baby. Gemma had a memory from fifteen years ago of Will at her twenty-first birthday party, helping her

blow out the candles and giving her a present of his own making, a lopsided elephant birthday card. 'This lady is his aunt,' said Greg hurriedly. The young constable said nothing, just stared at Gemma with her wide blue eyes.

'Where might I find him?' Gemma asked.

'You could try asking at the Landsdowne Centre. Most of the addicts go there for the needle exchange. They might know where he's been hanging out.'

The Landsdowne Centre was located in an old building that had once been a comfortable gentleman's residence last century. There was a small dispensary, a part-time doctor and various rooms for meetings and interviews. Gemma spoke with Irene, a young D&A counsellor who looked, Gemma thought, as if she'd had a big one the night before. Nearby, a young girl with a close-shaven head printed in a leopard pattern and wearing huge hoop earrings sat and waited on one of the chairs alongside the staircase.

'Yes,' said Irene, pushing her hair away from her eyes and wincing a bit. 'We know Will.'

'How is he?' asked Gemma, dreading what she might hear.

Irene shrugged. 'He's still alive,' she said. 'He talks about going into Rehab. He was all set to go a few months ago, but he didn't show up at the interview.'

'I've got a letter for him,' Gemma said. 'From his mother. Would it be possible to get it to him?'

'You could leave it here. He comes in quite often. I'll pass it on to him if I'm here.'

'But what if you're not?'

Again, Irene shrugged. 'I'll mention it to the others. They might be able to remember.'

'Thanks, but I'll try tracking him down myself,' said Gemma. 'Do you know where he hangs out?'

'He's an addict. Find out who he deals with. The only appointment an addict keeps is with the dealer.'

Gemma was aware of someone standing close behind her. She turned to see the young girl with the leopard-printed head.

'I couldn't help hearing you,' she said. 'I know Will. I could pass a letter on to him.' Gemma looked at her. The girl's eyes were clear and alive and her skin glowed pink and healthy.

'This is Tasha,' said Irene. 'She's a volunteer with us.'

Gemma made a decision. Hours and hours of thankless footwork might yet be avoided. She pulled Kit's letter out of her back pocket.

'It's from his mum,' she said. 'It's OK. She just wants to let him know that she loves him.'

Tasha took the letter and Gemma wondered what the protocol might be. 'Do you want-um-something for your trouble?' she asked.

The girl frowned and shook her head. 'Heavens, no,' she said. 'Will is a friend.'

'Addicts don't have friends,' said Irene tiredly. 'Only acquaintances they can still use. Tasha is still learning.'

Tasha raised an eyebrow but said nothing.

'It's very good of you,' Gemma said, pulling out one of her cards. 'Here,' she said. 'This is me.' The girl studied it and Gemma admired the glossy leopard hair in front of her.

'Thanks,' said Tasha, pocketing the card and Kit's letter. 'You never know when a PI might come in handy.'

'I offer a special service,' Gemma added. 'Called "Mandate". If you ever want a man checked out, I'll do you a good deal.'

'I prefer to check out my own men,' said Tasha. Down the hall, a door opened.

'Tasha?' someone called.

'Can I have one of your cards?' Irene asked and Gemma gave her one.

'You need your man chucked out, Irene,' Tasha called out gaily over her shoulder as she went down the hall. 'Not checked out.' Gemma left them to it.

She was driving down Springfield Avenue noticing the new buds on the plane trees when the sound of a brawl drew her attention. Two men were pushing a third around. Gemma couldn't hear what they were saying. But the two young toughs now had the third man, who seemed as if he was trying to explain something to them, up against the wall of a corner building. Now they were throwing punches and their victim was making no attempt to defend himself, just standing cowering, trying to protect his face from the blows. She hated seeing that; the old copper in her wanted to interfere, but she kept driving slowly past, taking the assailants' descriptions more from habit than because she intended to do anything about it. Just another common sight on the streets of Sydney, she thought, so she was amazed to see the wallopers suddenly turn the corner in a paddy wagon and two officers jump out, including the little blonde number with the pearl earrings. They lay into the two bullies very proficiently, pulling them off their prey. In no time the tiny blonde had the taller of the two bullies pressed up against the wall, her riot stick neatly pushed up under his chin.

Gemma wound down her window as she passed by. 'Well done, officer,' she called to the tiny policewoman, who turned around in surprise as her partner cuffed the subdued pair. The blue eyes flashed in recognition. 'They're always worse when there's two of them,' she said. 'Makes each of them nastier. Come on you two. Into the van. You too, sir,' she

said to their victim, who was attempting to slip away. 'We'll need to talk to you.'

Behind Gemma, a car honked; she was blocking the street. But she hardly heard it. That's what it was. *That's what explained it.* Now the driver in the car behind her was leaning on his horn and the car behind him also started. Gemma suddenly came to. Of course! How come I took so long to see it? 'Always worse when there's two of them,' the young policewoman had said. Pieces of the incomprehensible puzzle suddenly shifted to make a picture that was perfectly clear. She accelerated away, her mind racing with excitement, rearranging the puzzling facts about this case. Now they started to fall in order. Now they were making sense. She drove as fast as she could back to the police centre.

TWENTY-ONE

'There are two of them!' she said to Angie the minute Angie appeared in view back at the police centre. 'Two!'

'Two what?' Angie's frown wrinkled her forehead, making her eyes darker and greener.

'Two killers. We're dealing with two different offenders.' Gemma jumped out of the lift, nearly knocking over a seriously overweight senior sergeant who wasn't looking where he was going either. The puzzling aspects of the investigation unjumbled themselves in her mind and started to fall into neatly fitting pieces. 'Organised and disorganised together, Ange.' They hurried back along the corridor towards Angie's office. Gemma saw the fine lines of concentration on Angie's forehead. 'Think about it,' she continued as they turned into the room, 'when we first meet him, he's just an opportunist, cruising, looking for chances. Then suddenly, he's breaking into houses, kidnapping.'

'You're just trying to get your sister off the hook,' said Angie.

'My sister's not on the hook. We are. Or rather, we were. We've been stuck trying to make sense of something that doesn't work. You think about it,' Gemma said again. 'That offender suddenly went from passive to active. He went from

making a woman out of clothes to *taking a real woman from her house.* That might work in the movies, but you know and I know from our profiling experience that these are two entirely different MOs. And very unlikely to come from the one personality. It suggests two entirely different personalities.'

A light drizzle had started and Angie was standing at her window, looking out into the lightwell. Then she turned round to face Gemma. 'My experience tells me we've just interviewed the killer earlier on today. You want to talk profiling? Okay. You'll remember then that the killer more often than not turns out to be someone who has been interviewed in the early stages of the investigation and then cleared. Mistakenly. *Like happened just a while ago.*'

But Gemma wasn't intimidated. It seemed so obvious to her now. 'Listen to me. The first woman he kills he leaves lying on the floor,' she said. 'The second one he wraps in layers and takes out into the bush to hide. Doesn't make sense. But it does if there're two of them. Two killers working as a team.'

'There's one killer,' said Angie, her voice rising. 'And I'm pretty sure I know who it is.'

'You've got to keep an open mind, Angie. You've just locked on to Clive Mindell.'

'I do keep an open mind. I haven't "locked on" to Clive Mindell without damn good reason. Newspaper clippings of the murders, souvenired panties for Godsake.' She paused before continuing. 'Gemma, you used to be a good cop but then you left the job. All this sitting in cars all day has fevered your imagination.'

'For Chrissake, you think about it!' Gemma felt her own anger rising. 'Layers and layers of plastic and fabric around a body. What's that *saying*? That's saying "I *hide* my victims. I

wrap up my crimes. I don't leave them lying on the floor." So why did he take another one out of her house and kill her? I'll tell you why. Because at Maroubra, there was *only* Killer One. A pathetic little passive turd who panicked when he was interrupted doing his ritual. But at the Perrault house, there was Killer One *and* someone else. Killer Two. There must have been a car for the second crime. We know that. Killer Two has a car. Killer One doesn't. He cruises around on foot, looking for open motel doors, open windows. That's how they subdue a girl. And take her away in the car. That's why the clothing effigy at the Perrault house was so different – not done properly. Killer One didn't have time to do his thing properly. Maybe Killer Two stops him. That's why there were so many discrepancies and changes.' Gemma paused. 'Killer One meets up with someone else. Someone much more dangerous. I can just see them. Talking at a pub. Swapping bravado. Exchanging fantasies.'

Angie picked up her briefcase. 'Fantasies, all right,' she said. 'That's what I'm hearing right now.'

'Angie, listen to me! I've worked it out. Kit said—'

'I don't want to hear what Kit said! I've had you theorists up to here. I'm going home.'

'*Please*, Angie. For behaviour to change, reality has to have changed. *You* had the same feeling that there was something we weren't seeing. You knew what I meant when I said that I felt we were missing something huge. You felt it, too. You did. Instinct.'

'My instinct tells me if I could've had another four hours with Clive Mindell, I could have nailed the bastard,' said Angie. 'Your sister's blind to the obvious. And it looks like you are, too.'

Gemma realised they were at a stand-off. She changed her tack. 'Where's Amy now?' she said.

'With her mum. We've moved them.'

'The killer's already made contact with her. You heard what Garry Copeland said. He feels he's part of the family. And now we're dealing with Killer Two. He already thinks he has a relationship with her. Angie, *Amy's in terrible danger.*'

'She's no longer where he rang. No one knows where she is now,' Angie snapped. 'She's in a safe place.'

Gemma thought of years of sitting off houses watching people who didn't even know she existed. She thought of an unlisted number and watching someone come out of a house in Fleming Avenue, Artarmon in the early morning. 'No place is safe,' she said.

'We've got good people with her,' said Angie, her voice rising. 'And we'll be watching Clive Mindell like a hawk. Nothing can happen.'

'If it's not him, you're wasting your manpower. And if you're not watching in the right direction, you can't know where the next attack might come from.'

'Goodnight,' said Angie. And she walked out of the room.

Gemma moved quickly to follow her. She saw Angie's lift go down to the basement, to the car park. She practically ran past Security in the foyer, throwing her Visitor's badge at them, ran out the doors and down into the street. Her car was parked in a No Standing zone across the road and already she could see the brown envelope under the windscreen. She didn't even curse, just grabbed it and jumped into her car, watching in the rear vision mirror. She saw Angie emerge from the depths of the car park and drive straight across Goulburn Street up into the opposite lane heading towards Oxford. Gemma pulled out, left into Riley and raced to the intersection, just in time to see her erstwhile colleague emerge from the lane and turn across the city bound traffic and into

Oxford, heading east. The lights were red at Taylor's Square, holding Angie up, so that Gemma had time to do the same, getting herself into the centre lane and keeping an eye on Angie, who was two cars ahead of her in the inside lane. Gemma settled down into follow mode.

It was a good follow. Angie led her all the way to Bondi Beach and along Campbell Parade. Gemma had three cars between them when she saw Angie turn left into Curlewis. The smell of salt was strong here where the southerly blew without check and a brisk breeze tossed the tops of small shrubs and bushes planted in the street. Gemma drove past a block of four flats called 'Kia-ora' where she had a good view of the street. Angie turned left at the end of the street and Gemma followed her. There it was, a Budget Motel of two levels – eighteen units, nine on each floor, tiny, rusting balconies and a narrow cement parking area in front where a couple of dried-out palms moved in the wind.

Gemma braked quickly. Angie's car was parked across the road from the motel. She picked up the two-way. 'Base to Tracker Three,' she said, checking her rear vision. 'Copy, please.'

Spinner's voice came in, his high voice penetrating the slight static. 'We've finished the Cross Weld job,' he said, thinking she wanted an update. 'I'm just about to leave on my way home.'

'Good work, Spinner,' she said. 'Hey, can you do me a favour? Put in a couple of hours now? Sitting off a motel in Hallam Avenue, Bondi?'

'What's going on?'

'That's what I don't know,' she said. 'Could be my girlfriend is having an assignation in a sleazy joint. Or it might be the place where a frightened little girl and her

mother are hiding out. That's what I want you to find out. I'd do it myself except I've got a date.'

'Steve's back already?'

'Yes,' she said, 'and no.'

'Women,' said Spinner. 'I'll see what I can do. What am I looking for?'

Gemma described Mrs Perrault in detail and gave what information she could from her memories of the photograph of the sisters. 'I don't know how much police activity there'll be,' she said. Unmarked police cars stuck out like dogs' balls, she thought, especially the pursuit vehicles; the shiny Commodores and Fords with the telltale new number plates and rego stickers all issued in the same month. The wide wheels and the low suspension.

'I'll come over now,' he said. 'Noel's already gone home. He was in a bad mood all afternoon. Really pissed off.'

Gemma grunted, signed off and hooked the two-way back into its housing. She switched on the radio. Golden Earring were revving up 'Radar Love'. This is my life, she thought, sitting off other people's lives, watching other people's messes and intrigues. Watching the victims of violence. Keeping myself busy with other people's business so that I don't have to look at how fucked my own life is. But this is different, she told herself. This is guardian angel work. Amy Perrault has attracted the attention of a very dangerous predator.

She thought of her men. She wondered what her father was doing right now. The sight of Angie running across the road to her car jolted her into action. Angie pulled out in a rush and Gemma followed, keeping another car between them all the way back to the main road and up the hill, heading south. In Bondi Road a marked police car joined them, sitting behind hers. Something was up. She checked in the rear vision mirror. He wasn't interested in her. At the

lights, he came up beside Angie's car and cut in behind it. He was coming along too, wherever Angie was going. Gemma felt the adrenalin surge and she accelerated, singing along, her blood up for the chase. '*We got a thing, and it's called radar love,*' she sang. '*We got a vibe in the sky*', following them all the way to the Perrault household, now devoid of its women, in South Coogee.

Gemma pulled her car up and parked down the street opposite the Perrault house. She ran across the street and through the small group of people who had gathered on the street outside the house, curious about this sudden renewed police activity. Suddenly, Angie appeared on the front door step.

'What's happened?' Gemma asked. 'What's going on?'

'What are you doing here?'

'I followed you, Angie.' Gemma shrugged. 'It's my job. And you asked me to keep an eye on things for you.' She took a deep breath, waiting for the storm. But it didn't come.

Instead, Angie stepped aside, allowing Gemma to come in. 'Take a look at this,' Angie said, 'before everyone gets here.'

Gemma walked in. Everything looked just the same – the neat, clean, suburban house she'd visited in the dawn two days ago. She followed Angie down the hallway to the Perrault sisters' bedroom, stood at the doorway and looked in, her breath catching in her throat at the sight.

TWENTY-TWO

The Perrault sisters' pretty bedroom was ruined. A huge uneven star of blood eclipsed the lavender wallpaper opposite the window. Darkening stains of blood drenched the white bedspreads and spilled onto the floor. Gemma took it in. The window pane opposite her was smashed and bloody blades of glass lay on the carpet. A blood-soaked half brick lay near a chair. Angie came up behind her. 'The blood was thrown in the window in a weighted plastic bag. With enough force to burst it on the wall.'

'What a thing to do,' Gemma said, turning away, sickened.

'Ask your sister about it.' Angie couldn't help the barb. 'She's the expert on sickos.'

'It's got to be some crank,' Gemma said, moving carefully around the room. 'The chances are against it being related to the killer.'

'You and Kit,' said Angie. 'Holmes and Watson. How can you be so sure?' she said. 'I know of at least one other murder where the killer did something like this back at the murder house.'

'That was in America,' said Gemma. 'Not here.'

'So was Kentucky Fried Chicken,' said Angie. 'And now it's here.'

Gemma knew when to shut up. Angie left the room, pulling out her mobile. Gemma followed her out after a second, noticing that the Crime Scene people were arriving.

In the backyard of the house, Angie rang off the mobile, flung her notebook to the ground, then swore and kicked it. Then she put her hands on her hips and walked away, gathering herself. She came back to where Gemma waited and pulled out a cigarette. Her face was pale and her eyes were bright with anger. 'That was Bruno. Clive Mindell hasn't come home. He's not at work either.' She picked up her notebook. 'He's vanished into thin air. Fucking hell!' She paced angrily. 'This investigation,' she said, 'is all over the shop. Half my people are off at court today. I'm stuck with bloody Bruno and his hostility.'

'Can't you talk to the boss about him?'

'What? And have everyone say I can't hack it? That I have to run to Daddy when I've got a problem? No thanks.' She stuffed the notebook back in her bag. 'I feel like tossing it all in,' she said. 'Getting out of the job.'

Gemma stared at her. 'You're not serious,' she said. 'You love it. It's the reason you get out of bed in the morning. It's what makes your heart pump.'

Angie looked around as if she hadn't heard. 'You know what I'd like to do?' she said, making a wide sweep with her arm as if scooping up and throwing away all Sydney crime. 'Get away from all this stinking nastiness and move to the country. Get a little cottage with roses all around it. Grow vegetables and keep chooks. Breed Turkish water cats.'

'You'd last till morning tea time, day one,' Gemma said, 'never mind your bloody Turkish water cats.'

Angie pushed her hair out of her eyes. 'Seriously,' she said, 'if there were any decent men around, I'd be having babies in the country. I wouldn't be here, looking for a knife-crazed

homicidal psychopath who's already killed two women. I'd be humming in the garden, hanging out the washing.'

'Angie, I'm your *friend*,' said Gemma, putting her hand on the other woman's arm. 'I've known you for fifteen years. You'd be screaming in the rose garden and hanging yourself on the washing line.' She thought of something. 'Whatever happened to Dreamboat?'

Angie just looked at her with the 'Don't ask me' blazing from her green eyes. Gemma tried another tack. 'Come on, Angel Face,' she said, reaching out with her hand. 'I'll buy you a coffee. Have something to eat.' I'm sounding like Kit, she thought to herself. This will never do.

'I can't,' said Angie. 'I'll have to work late. Especially after this. I want to get back and see if those test results have come back from the Institute. I've got so much to catch up on.'

'I still think,' Gemma said, 'that we're looking for *two* homicidal psychopaths.'

Angie took a deep breath and Gemma braced herself for the assault. This is it, she thought. I've really done it now. She remembered from past experience, both personal and from witnessing other occasions, just what Angie could be like in a rage attack. But it didn't happen. Gemma stood there, tense, waiting. But the atmosphere between them was no longer charged.

'You know?' said Angie. 'You may have a point about there being two offenders. It fits everything we know about the case. It's the explanation that makes sense of the suddenly different MO.' She paused. 'And there's no reason Clive Mindell can't be one of them.' She pulled out a cigarette and lit it. 'I'd love to have a break, but I can't just yet,' she said. 'I've got so much to do. And now I'll need to talk to Garry Copeland about the two-offender scenario. Get that out to everyone before I knock off. We need to find out what

friends Mindell might have and where he might be hiding out.' She reached over and touched Gemma on the hand. 'Thanks,' she said. 'Things have been bloody tough lately. The job. The men. The whole damn circus. I know I'm a touchy bugger. But don't think I don't appreciate you.'

TWENTY-THREE

Gemma couldn't get the bloody bedroom scene out of her mind and, because there had been no body in it, it somehow seemed worse than the crime scenes where there were. Such contrivance, such spite, such *nastiness*. Blood is very provocative, she thought. It stirs us up. The bloodstains of another crime came to her mind and a thought suddenly crystallised. I'm going to go ahead and clear my father's name. Despite him. Whatever it takes. Because even if his name is no longer my name, his blood is mine. Was she using her father as 'the man' to give meaning to her life when in reality, it was she herself who was ailing? She thought of Kit's words that the answer is never a man. Did they apply to her in this? She found she'd paused with her key in the lock, immobilised by the thought. She pushed it aside and opened the door. Her heart sank lower as she remembered there was no Taxi to greet her. She walked to the sliding doors, willing him to be sitting on the deck. He wasn't. She unlocked the doors and called him. Nothing happened. No wobbling ginger shape coming across the grass towards her. She turned at the sound of someone at the door.

'Who is it?' she called out.

'It's me.'

She opened the door. The Ratbag stood there with a

tear-stained face, holding a carton. Inside, Gemma could hear the kestrel scraping and moving.

'Mum won't let me keep him. She says he's smelly and he's not. And I've got to get rid of him.'

'Come in,' said Gemma.

The Ratbag walked inside holding the carton. Despite his distress, he looked around. 'Cool,' he said.

'Have you still got those flowers?' she asked him.

He nodded, looking around. 'Your decor is the *same* as the flowers,' he said, noticing. 'You said they didn't match.'

Good one, Ratbag, Gemma thought. How many kids your age would notice that? 'Maybe I could offer you a job sometime,' she said to him and laughed at his puzzlement. She went into her office, where messages winked redly on her answering machine.

The Ratbag looked around him. 'Is this your private investigator's office?' he asked.

'What are you going to do about the kestrel?' Gemma asked, returning.

'Dad said he'd help me make a cage for him,' the boy said hopefully.

'When?'

The Ratbag shrugged. 'I don't know. Sometime. When I see him next.'

'That's not good enough. When will you see him next?'

The Ratbag shrugged again. 'I don't know.'

The two-way crackled and she grabbed it. 'Tracker Three to base; copy, please.' It took her a second to remember that Spinner was in Bondi.

'Yes, Spinner?' The Ratbag's eyes were as big as saucers over the top of the carton.

'I've been lucky. I've got those two for you,' said Spinner. 'There's only one unit that has a mother and a daughter. The

others are all couples or backpackers. I had a nice chat with the manager. Place is owned by an ex-cop.' That makes sense, thought Gemma. Angie calling in a favour. 'Do you want me to do the ditty?' Spinner was saying. "Doing the ditty" meant establishing the target's ID. A nasty mix-up with two brothers and one car had brought a very delicate surveillance operation undone at a critical moment, Gemma recalled.

'No,' said Gemma. 'Which unit is it?' Gemma scribbled down the details. Number 16.

'If there's nothing else, I'm going home,' Spinner said. But he didn't sign off and Gemma sensed there was something else he wanted to say.

'What is it, Spinner?'

There was a pause. 'It may not be anything.' His voice trailed off.

'What?' Gemma repeated. She could sense his reluctance to speak when he wasn't sure of his facts.

'There's someone else here,' he said, 'in a white Toyota ute. With a wheelbarrow on the back. He's sitting off some distance from the motel so I can't tell if that's his target. But that's what I'm doing, too. I'm pretty sure he's one of us.'

'Another surveillance operative?' she asked.

'Could be,' said Spinner. 'He's been there as long as I have. Just sitting. Just like me.'

Maybe Angie had organised someone else privately. Gemma felt a pang of jealousy. Had the conflict with Kit and then with her changed her friend's mind, made her decide to keep friendships and business in separate compartments? She could hardly blame Angie, Gemma thought, for wanting to keep things simple.

'Angie must have decided to use some assistance,' she finally said.

'Everyone is watching everyone else,' Spinner was saying.

'It's a crazy world. Anyway, it's none of my business now. Without a ditty we can't be one hundred per cent sure, but if you're satisfied I'm going home.'

Gemma signed off and the Ratbag ogled the two-way. He shifted the carton and the kestrel scraped inside. She glanced at her watch. It was twenty-five to seven. Richard Cross! She'd completely forgotten.

'I've got to go out again,' she told him. 'You can leave the bird here while we think what to do.'

The Ratbag's face lit up with the first smile Gemma had ever seen on him. He had thick hair and eyebrows that were a bit too heavy for his young face. 'That would be so cool.'

She was touched. 'Here,' she said, 'give him to me.' The Ratbag handed the box over and Gemma peeked inside. The large brown hawk-eye looked straight into hers, contrasting with the yellow cere. In the box she could see a small water container and a tiny dead mouse. 'I haven't got any more mice for him,' the Ratbag said. 'I haven't got any money left.' Gemma felt relieved and carefully lifted the box, sliding it on top of the large wardrobe. 'That's okay,' she said. 'You can owe me. Come on, out. I've got to get ready.' The kestrel's talons rasped as he struggled but then he settled into silence.

'I could pay you back next time I see Dad.' Gemma nodded. 'Can I come and visit him tomorrow?' the Ratbag asked.

'You can,' she said.

'Do people get after you?' the boy asked as they walked out of the office towards the front door.

'What do you mean?' She looked down at him and his intelligent eyes looked frankly into hers.

'If you're chasing baddies,' he said, 'maybe one of them might get cranky and then chase after you.'

'It's not very likely,' she said.

'I would,' said the boy. 'If I was a baddy and you were hunting me, I'd just kill you and then you wouldn't be able to get me any more.'

Gemma raised an eyebrow. 'Then it's a good thing,' she said as she put him out the door, 'that you're not a baddy, isn't it.'

After he'd left, she checked that the kestrel was securely placed on top of her wardrobe then raced into the shower. She had less than twenty minutes to get ready and she wasted five of them putting on and taking off three different outfits. She finally settled for her black skirt, cream silk blouse and a red jacket. She had just finished putting on her lipstick when Richard Cross knocked on the door.

'But it must be very interesting work,' Cross said. Ravesisi's was filling up and some brave people were sitting on the balcony despite the southerly breeze. They'd enjoyed their meal and were just finishing the coffee and truffles.

Gemma shrugged. 'Yes and no,' she said. 'People are always interesting. Sitting in vehicles all day is not.'

He laughed. 'You still sound like a cop,' he said. '"Vehicles",' he quoted. 'Most of us just say "car".' He was looking very good, Gemma thought, in his white shirt and blazer. There was a neat, clean-cut finish to him: trim hair, white teeth, nothing out of place, and yet there was an edge that made him extremely interesting. She was very curious to know his history with women. All in good time, she thought.

'Is there anything else you would like?' he asked. 'A nightcap?'

Gemma looked at the wine list again. They'd already shared a bottle of white and she'd had a gin and tonic before the meal. 'Cognac would be very nice,' she said.

So she was feeling very mellow on the drive back to her place, but not quite mellow enough to overlook his earlier remark. 'How did you know I used to be a cop?' she asked.

Did he hesitate a little too long before answering her? Damn that last drink, she thought. I've lost my finesse. 'When I'm interested in a woman,' he said, 'which by the way doesn't happen very often, I make it my job to find out as much as I can about her.'

Gemma turned to look at his well-proportioned profile in the car's dim interior. They were driving around the coast near Tamarama and the sea crashed in luminous white waves along the beach under a half moon. 'What else have you found out about me?' she asked.

'Enough to make me want to know a whole lot more.' As lines go, Gemma thought, it was pretty nice.

At her place, she fumbled the key and dropped it and they both bent to get it at the same time, bumping their heads together. 'Sorry,' they both said and laughed. Richard patted her head gently. 'Didn't hurt you, did I?' He left his hand there, cupping her neck, looking into her eyes, and it seemed impossible to Gemma not to ask him if he'd like to stay.

'What's really important to you?' Richard asked as they lay together later, Gemma's head on his chest.

'Finding my cat,' she said.

'And?'

'Clearing my name.'

He turned to her with interest. Here goes, she thought, and she told him all about her father and the murder of their mother. He listened in silence and didn't say anything for a long time. Gemma started to get anxious. He was revolted, she started to think. It's put him right off me.

The old anxiety swirled in her guts and she moved away from him.

'Say something,' she finally said, trying to sound lighthearted.

'It was such a long time ago,' he said. 'Are you sure your father hasn't got a point? Do you really want to drag it all up again?'

'I've thought about it,' she said. 'And I'm determined to go ahead. Whatever it means facing.'

Then he turned to look at her. He put a finger gently under her chin, like a father might do to a child. 'The past,' he said, 'can be very dangerous. Think about it.'

She looked into his face. In the dim light of her bedroom, he seemed much older. She thought how Kit had said something similar to her. 'I don't ever want to go back there,' Cross was saying. 'People's pasts can destroy them just as much as anything happening in the present.' He sighed and turned over away from her and Gemma settled herself down. She fell into a troubled doze.

He left her place in the early hours, promising to call. Gemma lay awake, unable to sleep. She got up and went outside on the deck, leaning against the rail, listening to the sound of the surf, so loud in the night silence. She had started something, she knew. Something big. She thought of their lovemaking. For a first night, it had been more than satisfactory and this morning her body had the luxurious post-sex feeling she hadn't experienced for a while. But it is not wise, she thought, to become involved on the rebound, *and* with a client. The Cross Weld contract was very important; only a few thousand dollars left before she reached the limit of the overdraft. Her mind kept jumping to the blood-soaked bedroom, and the chilling fact that the killer had contacted

Amy. Despite all the other concerns she had at the moment, she felt that this was her case, too. She wanted to stretch protective wings over the Bondi motel because these suffering people were like her family, also disfigured by bloodstains and a maniacal killer. She shuddered. She padded back to bed and snuggled down again, allowing dreamy thoughts of Richard to replace the Perrault family's nightmare. Memories of his solid body became hazy as she fell into a deep sleep.

TWENTY-FOUR

Someone was banging on her front door. Gemma hauled herself out of bed and yelled, 'Who is it?'

Angie's voice from outside. 'Amy Perrault's gone from right under our noses. I've just been called out. I'm on my way there.'

Gemma struggled into her clothes, desperately trying to wake up. Her worst fear had materialised. He'd come back for Amy. But how? She fumbled with a zip. With all the bloody call-outs I've had recently, she thought as she went into the kitchen and grabbed a glass of orange juice from the fridge, I might as well be back in the job. Outside, the eastern sky was still black and so was the sea, with only a tiny silver line delineating each from the other as she made her way to the car.

Gemma parked opposite the Bondi motel, where Angie and Bruno were visible near the entrance. She dragged herself out of the car, fighting the effects of lack of sleep and alcohol. The interlude with Richard Cross already seemed light years away.

'But she's not a cop any longer,' she could hear Bruno saying as she crossed the road to join them. 'And she's got no business here.'

'She is part of this investigation team,' Angie said. 'She was the first victim. And now, she's working for me.' Bless you, Angie, Gemma thought, as her friend greeted her with a nod.

'First I've heard of it,' said Bruno. 'Does the boss know about this?'

'Listen, Bruno, if you give me any more trouble I'm putting you on paper and there'll be a few other things the boss'll know. Don't think I don't know how you're bad-mouthing me when I'm not around.'

'What are you talking about?' His air of injured innocence was infuriating.

'You know damn well!' She swung around and went inside with Gemma trailing Bruno. They made their way up a staircase and along the upstairs hall until they arrived at No. 16. The door of the narrow motel room was half open and Angie pushed it wide as she walked in.

Garry Copeland, in T-shirt, sports coat and uncombed hair, turned as they entered the room and Angie's voice cut like a knife.

'Will someone please tell me what happened?' There was the sound of a toilet flushing and the bathroom door opened to reveal Mrs Perrault. A silence fell over the room as Mr Perrault, accompanied by a policewoman, came into the room. The Perraults sat together on the bed, the husband trying to comfort his distraught wife.

'I told her,' she said, 'on no account to go out. But she wouldn't listen to me. Then *he* rang. I know it was him—'

'Who's him?' Gemma asked.

'The boyfriend,' said Garry.

'She's been forbidden to give this phone number out to anyone,' sobbed Mrs Perrault.

'Who is he?' Gemma asked, remembering Aunt Merle and

forbidding and how useless it was as a method to control a wilful teenager.

'Brett Collins,' said Mr Perrault. 'He lives at 4/40 Clarendon Parade, Maroubra.'

Angie noted this and stepped into a corner of the room, turning her back on the rest of them. A moment later, Gemma could hear her talking to Maroubra police. 'They'll be there in two minutes,' she said.

'When did you realise she'd gone?' she asked the Perraults.

'She must've gone when I was dozing,' Mrs Perrault said. 'An hour or so ago. I can't sleep properly. Even with these pills.'

Angie checked her watch. It was nearly four. 'Bruno, downstairs please and look out for the uniforms and Brett Collins when they arrive.' Bruno gave her a look before leaving the room. Angie's mobile rang and she snatched it up. She listened and her face was grim. She rang off. 'Maroubra cops have checked his place. He's not there and neither is his car. Let's hope they've parked somewhere and are just doing a bit of what comes naturally.'

'But we can't assume that,' said Gemma. Beside her, Mr Perrault tightened his grip on his distraught wife.

'You bet we can't,' said Angie. 'That's why we're taking this very seriously indeed. Every man and his dog will be on the look-out for him and his yellow Corolla. He's got the state after him.'

Mr Perrault turned to Angie, his face distorted with despair. 'How could you let this happen?' he cried. In the silence that followed, Garry Copeland ran his fingers through his hair in a gesture that Gemma remembered. She noticed his face moving, as he chose his words carefully. It's impossible, Gemma knew, to protect someone against their will. Protection requires the cooperation of

the protected. But she hoped Garry wouldn't point this out just now.

'We'll find her,' Garry said. 'Everything possible is being done.'

'Yes,' said Angie. 'Finding her is our priority.'

Mrs Perrault raised her face. Her voice was scarcely a whisper as she broke another long silence. 'It's not their fault,' she said to her husband. 'Amy was determined to go.' Her voice faltered. 'We had a fight, Amy and me. A terrible fight.' She paused. 'Bianca not even buried—' Her voice broke and her husband touched her on the shoulder. The woman blinked and continued. '—and Amy can only think of some *boy*! I forbade her. I told her I couldn't talk about it. She screamed at me. She ran into the bathroom and slammed the door. Dad was over at my sister's getting some clean things and I must've dozed off. When I woke she'd gone. It was just like finding Bianca's bed that morning all over again.' Mrs Perrault leaned right over, sobbing onto her knees, her hands holding her head. Her husband looked as if he didn't know whether to touch her or not; his hands were hovering in distress over her collapsed form.

Garry beckoned Gemma to follow him out to the balcony. It was quiet out there, with only the odd car moving across the busy intersection overlooked by the motel. A light breeze lifted the hair off Gemma's forehead.

'Angie's talked to me,' he said to her, 'and I think the possibility that we're dealing with two of them is very real.' Gemma stared at him. Any pleasure she might have felt about him coming round to her point of view was undercut by the seriousness of the situation for the younger Perrault girl. Garry kept his voice low, aware of Mrs Perrault only a few metres away. 'If there's two killers acting together, the sum is greater than the parts. Two killers bring out the worst

in each other, and then some. Statistically, it's not a common occurrence but it happens.' He gestured behind him towards the Perraults. 'Fingers crossed that she's just run away with the boyfriend.'

Angie joined them, the three of them almost filling the tiny balcony. 'And for your sake, too,' he added, looking at her. 'If the press gets hold of this it'll be horrendous. First the blood attack at the other house. Now the girl running away like this. We should have had someone here with them.'

Angie shook her head. 'Hang on, hang on,' she said. 'The blood attack. That was a nasty piece of work who lives down the street from the Perraults and works at the abattoirs. I haven't had a chance to tell you. I've told the arresting officers to charge him with everything. Amy's absconding is not due to us. I suggested leaving someone with them here as strongly as I could. But *they* said no way. They didn't want a stranger living with them. Ian was downstairs all the time but he didn't see her. He was watching for someone trying to come *in*, not Amy trying to sneak out.'

Garry Copeland shrugged. 'It still looks bad for the police,' he said.

'The police've been looking bad since Ned Kelly,' Angie said. 'Come on, Gems. Let's get out looking for that Corolla. Folllow me, OK?'

They left Garry Copeland with the Perraults and Bruno standing just inside the motel entrance. As Angie started her car the radio spoke.

'We've found the car. Out near Port Botany. Marine Drive.'

'We're on our way,' said Angie, checking the exact location and swinging the door shut as she accelerated away, Gemma right behind her.

* * *

The yellow Corolla could hardly be seen for all the cars and people around it. On the verge near a tall cyclone fence beyond which huge lights from the port blazed, bright as midday, Gemma spotted its canary colour, the area around it already surrounded by the blue and white checked plastic tape. Across a flat concrete desert through the fence, the shapes of cranes and huge containers cast long, black shadows. There wasn't much traffic at this hour, but any car that passed by slowed down to see what was happening.

The Crime Scene detectives were on the job. One with his back to them was bent over at the opened driver's door, putting samples into bags and containers with pale rubber-covered hands. Gemma could see past him and as she came up behind the stooping policeman, she knew that the boy slumped forward over the wheel was already dead.

'Shot,' said the Crime Scene man, straightening up. 'Young fella by the name of Brett Collins. The doctor just left.' He moved to one side and Gemma could see the dark red hole in the boy's temple, the line of blood that ran down his tender young face, pooling in the little concavity formed by his lips squashed against the steering wheel.

Gemma walked around to the passenger side. On the seat was a little leather bag, square and with a leather strap. The initials 'AP' were engraved on a tiny gold shield. The bag was slightly opened and a used handkerchief, a comb and some coins had spilled out onto the seat.

'She was taken here,' said Gemma. 'My bet is they stopped the car somehow, and then threatened the boyfriend with the gun if she didn't do as she was told.'

'They must have been watching the house,' said Angie.

'Oh God,' said Gemma. 'Spinner. The white Toyota.' She grabbed her mobile and rang Spinner's number.

'What white Toyota?' Gemma heard Angie ask as Spinner's sleepy voice answered.

'Spinner, sorry about the hour. That white Toyota. The one you saw last night at the motel. Tell me again what you thought.'

'What white Toyota?' Angie's voice, more insistent this time.

Gemma strained to hear Spinner. 'I thought it was someone in the business,' he said, through the faint interference. 'Tinted windows, the wheelbarrow on the back. All the builders were long gone. What's he still doing here at this hour, I asked myself?'

You are very good at what you do, Spinner, Gemma thought. I should tell you more often. 'Tell me what else you noticed about it,' she said instead.

'There were little side curtains on the window behind the driver's and passenger seats. He was leaning back in the seat, just like we do on a long follow.'

'Did you get the registration number?' Gemma asked, and waited while Spinner logged onto his laptop. He read it out to her and she wrote it down. Gemma signed off and turned to Angie, who was bristling too close to her. 'Angie, it might be that the killer was in Hallam Avenue last night. In a vehicle reported by one of my operators. A white Toyota, registration KHI 311, with a wheelbarrow on the back. Side curtains, tinted windows.'

Angie wasted no time. She took the details, organised a registration check and put the description of the vehicle out. She called and ordered some hapless junior officer to do the death message and make the formal announcement. 'Now tell me everything your operative said,' demanded Angie.

'Spinner felt that the driver of the Toyota was in the business,' said Gemma. 'In our – I mean, my business.'

'Security?' said Angie. She only paused a second, taking it in. 'I'll need to get Hallam Avenue checked to see if anyone saw a white Toyota ute last night. See if anybody saw the driver. Any possible description.'

There are hundreds of security firms in Sydney alone, Gemma thought, some large, some small operations. It would be a hopeless task trying to track some lone operative. Or ex-operative.

'There's nothing more I can do here,' Angie said. 'I'll have to make some inquiries about Clive Mindell's background. Your sister might know what sort of work he's done. Where we start looking for him. Then I've got to face the music in the morning. Somewhere in all that I've got to get some sleep.'

Gemma touched her friend's arm. 'You can't protect someone who won't cooperate,' she said. 'It wasn't your fault that Amy sneaked out.'

'I just hope the boss sees it that way.'

Gemma walked with Angie to her car and watched while she climbed in. Angie looked up at her, her hand on the handle of the open car door. 'This is my first really big case. I so want to get it right.'

Gemma nodded. 'Let's grab a few hours' sleep,' she said. 'I'll come back to the office with you and curl up on your floor. Make you a cup of coffee in the morning.'

On the way to the police centre, she couldn't stop herself driving past Steve's flat again, but this time she stopped outside. She found a pen in the glovebox and a spare manila envelope from the pack that she had on hand in the car for ditties. 'Dear Steve', she wrote. 'I'm so sorry about my behaviour. You were quite right to react the way you did. I just want to tell you that you are very important to me and that I have come to love you very much over the

last few years. Please forgive me. You deserve better.' She wrote his name and address on the envelope and got out of the car and pushed it into his letterbox. Maybe it would get to him. Maybe not.

TWENTY-FIVE

Later in the morning Gemma sat in Angie's office, staring at Angie's photos of her cat, Sabrina, pinned onto a grey locker near the wall. Her heart ached for her own Taxi. She'd had a shower in the Women's bathroom, and when she got back the day shift was arriving. Gemma had to wait in her friend's office while Angie took it on the chin in a nearby glassed-in area. Gemma couldn't hear any words – just the occasional muffled roar. It reminded her of lions at Taronga Park, the sound which came floating across the water to Aunt Merle's place as their keepers attended to them at 4 am. And it wasn't difficult to work out what had been said from Angie's white face and demeanour as she came out and closed the door behind her. She looked as if she were about to cry, but jumped instead when Senior Constable Sheila Stanton suddenly appeared. 'That white Toyota you wanted checked.'

Angie turned expectantly.

'We drew a blank. We went to the address on the rego but the guy there said he'd sold the vehicle weeks ago. Reckoned he sent in the transfer. I've got the RTA chasing it up right now.' She shrugged, seeing Angie's disappointment. 'We'll keep on it, and we've got everyone looking out for that vehicle.'

They were interrupted by Ian who followed Angie into her office. 'Sign this for me? Jack at the Institute made me promise to see you got this in person as soon as possible.'

Angie took the packet from the Institute of Forensic Medicine and ripped it open. The colour came back into her cheeks and her eyes widened. 'Holy shit!' she said, striding round the back of her desk, her face flushed with triumph. 'Got him!' Gemma, alerted by the energy in her friend's voice, felt a surge herself. 'Those pink panties we found in Clive Mindell's car,' Angie was saying. 'They belonged to – or at least were worn by – Bianca Perrault. They got a DNA match. We've got physical evidence now that links him to Bianca. We've *got* him!' She raced straight back into the boss's office.

Gemma felt as if she'd been kicked by a horse. Clive Mindell, Kit's client. Kit had been so wrong. I've been so wrong. There weren't two killers. It was Clive all the time. Angie came back into her office area and tossed the test results in front of Gemma on the desk. 'I knew it,' she said. 'All the time. My guts told me it was him. *Her* panties in *his* car. How's he going to explain that?' Angie was suddenly furious. All the pent-up frustration from the carpeting she'd just been given spilled out of her. 'I had him!' she said. 'I had the mongrel right here! If your bloody sister had just said a few words – a few measly words that I could've used for the Bail Magistrate, he'd be under lock and key! I had him in my hands and then he slips away – because of bloody Kit. Now he's gone missing and I'll tell you why. Because he's grabbed Amy Perrault!'

She ran out with the test result and Gemma tried to make sense of it, put it all together. The bulletin would be going out right now, over all the police airwaves. A statewide search would be underway within hours. Clive Mindell's face as well

as the face of the missing Amy Perrault would stare out from the evening newspapers as the man 'wanted by the police in connection with the murder of Bianca Perrault and the disappearance of her younger sister'. Something occurred to Gemma. If Clive Mindell knew that everyone was looking for him and Amy, he'd dig in even deeper, hide even harder. If Amy were still alive, this could sign her death warrant.

'Angie, wait!' She ran outside after her friend, but it was too late. Angie had already dispatched the bulletin to the media unit. Gemma was aware of the huge distance separating them. Angie was a serving cop, getting on with business, connecting with all the appropriate units of the police service, responding to the murder-abduction with all the force at her command. And all Gemma could do was stand helplessly and watch as the police machine geared itself up and into action. She'd been completely wrong, none of her assistance on this case had been helpful and she'd never felt more like an ex-cop in her life. The old agitation was rising in her belly, undermining her. She wanted to go downstairs to a basement club, a dive, where the smoky atmosphere was filled with the whisky voice of a club *chanteuse*, where strangers sat around tables in dim pools of light and drank too much. Where she could approach a man without a name and dance with him, hot and close, until they were naked back at a motel and she was grinding up against his weight, losing her mind and its pain in the best way she knew.

She drove to Glebe and parked opposite her father's flat, sitting in the car a while, wondering what she was doing there. Finally, she got out and walked around the side of the old mansion, to the garden flat at the back. She knocked on the door and a neat, balding man with a lean face and sharp eyes opened it.

'You must be one of Archie's daughters,' he said. 'I'm Paul Lestrange, your father's flatmate. Come in.' The solicitor who'd overreached himself, she thought.

Gemma stepped inside, looking around at the kitchen with its bachelor notes: bottles and jars in neat rows on the table, the absence of curtains or blinds on the window, the row of small tools hanging next to the kitchen utensils. 'I've just made a pot of tea,' he said, with a quick gesture of his long fingers. 'Would you like one?'

Gemma nodded. 'Dad's not in,' she said, more a statement than a question.

'He's gone out. He's given me some of his papers to read. Your father was a very eminent man. A friend of mine went to him for years. She said he was the leader in his field.'

'Did she get better?'

'Not really,' said Paul. The sharp eyes clouded and Gemma saw that he was older than she'd first assumed. He poured her a tea and she took it from him. She sipped it.

'Do you think something's worrying my father,' she asked 'or frightening him?'

'That's a funny question,' he said after a while. 'But it did seem odd that he was all gung-ho about clearing his name and then suddenly changed. He's talking now of writing his memoirs, but as a text. A personal yet academic account of his studies in narcotherapy. He's boning up on the new wave of drugs that weren't available in the 'sixties. He's all fired up about that now.' Paul Lestrange indicated the piles of folders and cartons of material visible through the kitchen door across the hallway, stacking the walls of her father's bedroom. Gemma could see from here that her father's desk was covered with piles of notes and sheaves of printed matter.

She walked over and stood at the door, aware that Paul

Lestrange was busying himself in the kitchen behind her. Suddenly, she was assailed by the memory of her father swinging out of the dark timber door of his study at Killara, towering over her, terrifying her. She brought her attention back to the present. She cupped the mug in her hand, looking around the room. It was neat and orderly but crammed with his records and papers. The little bunch of flowers Kit had brought him were already dried out and Gemma noticed that he'd failed to put them in water, just propped them in a pen and pencil jar. Feeling as if she were walking on forbidden ground, Gemma went to her father's desk. Incomprehensible tracts from pharmaceutical companies about the action of various drugs made up the top layer, mixed in with his almost illegible handwritten notes concerning multiple dosages. It was the name that drew her attention because she already knew it. 'Arik Kreutzvalt' she saw, heading a folder.

She opened it. There was the north Sydney address she'd remembered from Philip Hawker's notes. She glanced at the notes under his date of birth in 1947. 'Presents with severe depression, almost total absence of affect punctuated with rage attacks,' she read. 'Fixation with mother, castration complex. Schizophrenic episodes of delusion. Fantasises the murder of the mother . . .' Gemma closed the folder, feeling guilty about reading this old account of another human being's wretchedness. Tears welled up in her eyes. Some ancient heavy grief burdened her and with it the desire to pick up a stranger evaporated. She turned away and went back to the kitchen. 'Thanks for the tea,' she said. 'I'd better go.'

Paul Lestrange took the cup from her hand. 'I've been on the outside for a while,' he said without any embarrassment. 'Maybe you don't understand how it is.'

'Tell me.'

'When you first come out, it's huge. The adjustment, I mean,' said Lestrange. 'You swing from one extreme to another. Big mood swings, I remember. It's like being born again, except this time you're an old man, and not a child. It's very tricky. Very uncomfortable. Your father was away for thirty years. He's bound to seem, well, unstable for a while. Changeable. Maybe even seem capricious. Don't take it personally.'

'But I do,' said Gemma. 'I do take it personally that he's no longer concerned about proving his innocence.'

'He's served his time. It's all over. Can't you just put it behind you?'

'I'm still serving my time,' she said, her voice just a fraction away from wobbling. 'Either I'm the daughter of a vicious killer or I'm not. That's what people who know me must think. I've got an expert who is willing to give evidence that the bloodstain pattern interpretation that put my father away is completely wrong and that the stains actually *support* his story. I want *that* made public. I want people to know that. I want the papers to print that with just the same amount of publicity as they gave to my father's disgrace. My sentence won't be over until they do. Then, maybe I can think of putting it behind me.' She remembered her grandmother hiding the newspapers, suddenly switching off the radio or the television as soon as the case was mentioned. She brought her mind back to this moment and felt the defiance in her gaze.

'I'm so sorry,' he said. 'I didn't mean to upset you.' He was awkward now, not knowing where to put his long fingers. 'I've forgotten how to talk to women. That's another thing that gets lost.' Finally he tucked his fingers in his belt. Gemma walked towards the door. 'I'll tell your father you dropped in,' he said.

* * *

She just made it to the car before crying. She sat with the windows wound up and the radio turned up loud. *'Suicide blonde, suicide blonde,'* the singer screamed while Gemma sobbed and sobbed as the traffic moved around her. When she'd calmed down she drove round to Kit's but couldn't make herself heard at the front door, so she walked around the lane at the back and pushed the back gate of the garden open. She looked through the new grilles of the kitchen window and saw her sister sitting at the kitchen table, with several pens lying around, copying something from one book to another.

'What're you doing?'

Kit almost jumped out of her seat. 'Oh my God,' she said. 'You nearly gave me a heart attack.' She came to the back door and let Gemma in. 'I just heard the news. I'm rewriting my notes on Clive Mindell. It's completely illegal but some things are worse than others,' she said. Gemma noticed she was using different pens for the entries.

'I'm terrified the police will be here any minute with a warrant,' her sister was saying. 'I can't help convict him with his own honesty and frankness. It's unthinkable.'

'But, Kit. Think what he did. Some things *are* worse than others.' Kit didn't answer for a few minutes, but finished copying the last session. She threw down the pen, stood up and took a large cooking pot from under the stove, threw the original exercise book of notes into it, and went outside with a box of matches. Gemma followed her out. The garden looked neat, and sweet peas were starting to climb a lattice next to the pond.

'I still don't believe he's the one they're looking for,' Kit said as the book started to burn, sending up thin transparent daylight flames. 'I don't know how he came to have those panties. Perhaps he did just souvenir them. He *is* drawn

to violence. But so is the entire reading and cinema-going population of the West.' When the fire had died down, Kit took the remaining bits of burnt paper and crushed them up, throwing them in the pond. 'There. Now they can subpoena all they like.'

TWENTY-SIX

Not long after Gemma had left, Kit's doorbell rang. She patted her hair and tucked the blue skirt in neatly around her waist. She wondered who it might be. Gemma always yelled. Gerald always rang. Puzzled, she opened it and stood there. It was a thin, sick-looking boy in a black shirt and black jeans and an earring in his right eyebrow.

'Mum?'

Kit stood, transfixed. She couldn't speak for a few seconds. The shock sent her mind spinning. So many emotions flooded her. Disbelief, fear, love, anger, helplessness. Her heart started pounding as she searched the lined face in front of her for signs of the son she loved. He was still there somewhere, she saw, although three more years of heroin had ravaged his eyes, skin and hair. He looked like an old man, and he was stooped, his body drained of energy, collapsing into defeat and death. She swallowed. The moment she'd longed for. Then came the dread. More heroin-driven demands, more hatred, more insanity. More conversations that got crazier until someone smashed the phone down or slammed the door shut. 'Will,' she said. 'My dear, dear son.'

He couldn't talk for a moment, but stood, compressing his lips, controlling himself. 'I wanted to tell you I'm in Rehab,

Mum,' he said. 'I shouldn't really be here. I got permission to leave to do some business.'

Kit's heart and mind took that in. 'Permission?' she repeated. Will was asking permission? Subjecting himself to some other authority than the drive for more heroin? Automatically, she examined the energy level of his breath as it appeared in his voice, hearing the exhaustion; the tremor of fear, of sickness close to death. But there was an aliveness in his eyes that she couldn't remember having seen since he was a boy.

She stood aside. 'Come in. Please come in?'

He shook his head. His hair was clean and in need of a good cut. She thought of Hunca and Munca, the two bad mice. But they weren't bad at all. They were frustrated by deception. Just as Will had been, living in the lie of a marriage without love or mutual respect, living with his parents' words about love while manipulation and control were the actuality.

'I can't stay. I got a lift with my counsellor. I just wanted to say thank you for your letter.'

'My letter,' Kit repeated.

'It made me look at everything,' he said. 'As I was reading it, I felt something happen deep down in me. Like I really knew that I didn't want to live the life of an addict any more and I realised I was the only person in the world who could bring that about. I couldn't blame you and Dad any more for how I was living my life. You took responsibility for your part and that made me see that I had to take responsibility for my part too. I don't know how I'm going to do it. I feel so helpless. So smashed up. I don't know the first thing about living.' The first thing about living, he said. The professional part of her mind marked it.

'Did you detox properly?'

'Yes. At Basement 82. Then I got referred on to Riverside House. I said I needed help to stay clean.'

They looked at each other. Kit put her arms out and Will moved into them. Kit felt the tears running down her face as she held her son's thin, shaking body; shoulder blades felt like sharp knives under her fingers. She could feel the fine tremor that ran through his every cell. He had almost died, she sensed. 'Will,' she said. 'You've made the choice to live.'

He laughed his old laugh; a quick, short exhalation and pulled away from her, looking for something to blow his nose on, taking the proffered tissue from her. 'You were just about to say something then, weren't you. Like "It's not going to be easy"?' She smiled. He was right. His instincts had always been good until the drugs had numbed them. He paused. 'It hasn't been real easy the last few years. It's been a fucking nightmare.'

'Can I come and see you?'

'Yes,' he said, then, 'No. Leave it a bit longer. Visitors are discouraged in the first weeks.'

Kit nodded. 'Okay, darling. I'll ring in a day or so. See how you're going. If that's okay with you.'

He nodded. 'How's Dad?'

'He's okay. He's seeing someone professionally for his depression.' She decided not to mention the divorce just now. So many changes to deal with. So many changes to tell him about. He wasn't the grandson of a murderer, his mother and father had divorced. But not now. 'I notice a change for the better in him already.'

His voice changed. 'I've gotta go. Group's on this evening. We're not allowed to miss it.' This was very different, Kit knew, from the old defiance; the addict's bravado of 'I'll do what I want and fuck the consequences.'

'Oh, Will,' she said, her heart full.

There was a silence.

'I'll ring you,' he said, and he was gone.

She stood in the doorway a while, unable to move. Then she walked inside in a daze like a young girl in love, turning into the therapy room where her son's photograph stood on the mantelpiece. She lit the candle beside it. The beautiful youth in the photograph was no longer discernible in the face of her son. The conflict with Angie and the concern for Clive Mindell, the murders of two women, all now were pushed to a faraway position in the field of her mind. The phrase 'the first thing about living' kept repeating itself like a mantra. What is the first thing about living, she asked herself? For me? For Will? She sat in meditation and asked the question again. Gradually, her heart rate slowed and returned to normal. The trembling in her body, which she knew would also be occurring in every cell, also came to stillness. What is the first thing about living? The question became a mantra as she breathed with it.

TWENTY-SEVEN

The girl staggered up the embankment, blackberry hoops tearing at her naked thighs. She didn't care, any more than she cared that she was only wearing a filthy shirt. Almost blind from twenty-four hours in the dark, she squinted towards where she could hear the roar of the freeway. She had no idea how far she'd struggled. All she knew was that she must put as much distance between herself and that place and the men as quickly as possible. It had been a miracle that she'd been able to get away at all and only because her unconsciousness had lightened just enough for her to realise he'd gone. When she was certain he'd left the house, she'd fumbled until she'd torn the bandage from her eyes. This was the only chance she had. She'd been able to rouse herself from the stupor and, still with her wrists bound in front of her, had managed to climb out of the window and half fall, half jump from the upper storey through the tree which had both cut her badly and broken her fall. Winded and sobbing, she'd crawled away. But she was free. Away from the horror and the nightmare. Through the swirling instability of her mind, the thought of his return fuelled her with preternatural strength, so that now she was clawing her way up the steep rise where she could just see the tops of big rigs whooshing past through the slits of her swollen

eyes. Someone would stop for her, she prayed. Someone would take her home.

Kevin Jansen, chatting on his CB to his mate, Mad Dog, noticed something small and pale a couple of hundred metres down the Liverpool highway.

'Jesus,' he said. 'I think it's a girl. On the road. In the fucken road.'

'What's she doing?'

'She's waving. In the middle of the road. *Mate, I'm doing a hundred and ten!*' The huge brakes smacked onto the eighteen wheeler. The scream of metal on metal drowned Kevin's curses and the rig swerved as he fought to control it. 'Get off the road! *Get off the road you stupid fucken kid!*' It seemed to Kevin that the half-naked girl was rushing towards him, as if on a conveyor belt, ever closer to the rig's massive front end. He leaned on the horn, and the sound of it deafened him.

'*Please get off the road!*' Kevin screamed as the girl's terrified eyes rushed towards him. The girl fell back and the rig screeched past her, sliding to a halt fifty metres away, just off the road. Kevin put his hazard lights on and jumped out of the cabin. He could hardly see through the thick dust cloud churning around him. Coughing and blinking, he ran back to where the girl lay. As he came closer, he started tearing off his jacket to cover her. 'Jesus Christ, girlie,' he said. 'What's happened to you?'

In a few minutes, with the fainting girl beside him, now wrapped in a blanket, Kevin radioed to base. 'Call the police,' he said. 'Tell them I'm bringing a girl with me to Campbelltown police station. She's in a terrible state. She says her name's Amy Perrault.'

Angie waited impatiently outside while Mr and Mrs Perrault

stayed in the room with Amy and the doctor. She hated the stench of hospitals; blood and disinfectant mixed with an air freshener that smelled of plastic peaches and fake vanilla. She turned away into a corner and rang Gemma.

'We've got Amy Perrault. Somehow, she got away.'

'Who took her?'

'Can't say yet. We've hardly spoken. She's still in shock. The doctor says we can talk to her soon, if she stays stable. She's been vomiting and they're worried about dehydration. Especially after what she's gone through the last twenty-four hours.'

'Thank God,' said Gemma. 'It's really good of you to let me know.'

'There's another thing.'

'What's that?'

'You were right. There *are* two offenders involved.'

'Who?'

'That's the problem. She only saw one face. Ken will go through the FACE system with her as soon as possible. She was blindfolded and out of it a lot of the time. Doctor says an opiate's been used. Possibly codeine.'

It was nearly six o'clock before Angie played the videoed record of interview for the members of the Strike Force. Gemma, Colin, Bruno and several other divisional detectives watched the image on the monitor of Amy Perrault sitting up in bed, her parents on each side, giving an account of her abduction and the murder of her boyfriend. Mrs Perrault held her daughter's hand. With her hair pulled back from her face and her pale blue nightie, Amy looked about twelve, thought Gemma.

'Amy,' Angie was saying on the monitor, 'we want to let you rest as soon as possible. You've been through a terrific

ordeal. I just want to say on behalf of the investigation team how impressed we are with your courage and endurance.' The girl closed her eyes. 'I just want to read you this statement that you've given us, and if any little extra thing comes to your mind, tell me. The more you can tell us, the quicker we can get the men responsible for what happened to you.'

The girl nodded. Both the swelling on one side of her face and the sedative slowed her responses. 'I will,' she whispered.

Angie stood up and walked over to the monitor. 'Okay, everyone,' she said. 'You've heard what happened. How Amy and her boyfriend were pulled over by two men posing as plainclothes police officers in a vehicle using a flashing blue light. Those lights can be obtained fairly easily through security outlets. Then Amy was forced into the back seat of the other car with a blanket over her head, her boyfriend was shot, and the offenders took her to a house somewhere south of Sydney that we're desperately trying to locate.' She looked around at the group. 'Amy thinks they drove for about an hour, but her perception could be way out. At that house, Amy was blindfolded and raped by one offender. We're working on the fact that Killer Two has got to have a record somewhere. He's aware of forensic law. He hasn't revealed his face and he hardly speaks. When he does, it's in this rasping whisper. All these factors indicate a history of criminality. He's aware of police procedures. The Liverpool cops are pulling in all their known sexual criminals. Amy is an amazing young woman,' she added. 'She had no doubts about what her fate was going to be, and asked if she could write a last letter to her family. The offender agreed to this.'

'Yes,' said Kit when Gemma relayed the details to her shortly after in Kit's kitchen. 'It would play into his sense of the

family connection. He would like that. From his position of domination and power, he is granting her a request concerning the family that he feels some connection with. He feels in a very powerful position.'

'So,' said Gemma, 'she was given a notepad and a pencil and the blindfold was taken off. She wrote the letter. It is absolutely beautiful. So innocent. It is the last will and testament of a courageous young woman who demanded some sort of dignity from her tormentor. She's given a good description of one of the offenders. Garry Copeland calls him "the subordinate personality". But he's the one we know as Killer One. She didn't see the other man, Killer Two.' Kit waited for her sister to continue. 'She's been shown pictures of Clive Mindell, but she says that the offender she saw definitely wasn't him.'

'He's not involved, Gemma. He rang. He's terrified, not homicidal.'

'Angie still thinks he could be the one Amy didn't see,' said Gemma, 'because of the physical evidence linking him to Bianca. They've extended the statewide search. Mindell had a friend from Melbourne.'

'That's right,' said Kit. 'He told me about an outing with him. They went to the Blue Mountains.'

'Angie's mob is asking around trying to locate him.' Gemma sat at the kitchen table and picked at a dish of nuts. Kit faced her, leaning her back against the oven, warm from breadmaking.

'The truck driver who picked her up,' said Gemma, 'told the cops Amy just appeared on the road out of nowhere. Some local uniforms checked that spot and not far away is a smaller road that used to feed onto the freeway. Amy thinks she crossed that road at some stage while she was getting away. She wasn't sure how long

she was on foot. We've got Liverpool police looking for a half-built boat.'

Kit's eyebrow went up. 'I'll explain in a minute,' said Gemma. 'Fortunately, Amy tripped on the pathway on the way up to the house she was held at. The blindfold came off her face for a second. The house the cops are looking for is set back off the road and has a pathway with a gate leading from the road to the front of the house. We got Devlin the forensic hypnotist to work with Amy and he turned up a lot of very helpful detail about the house. Angie didn't play the hypnosis video because it's too slow.' Kit nodded, understanding. It could take hours to elicit information from a witness. 'Amy noticed a wire gate with some wrought-iron curls in the middle and a part of a letterbox. It's dark red. Shaped like a little house. There's a number on it that looks like sixty-two. Or sixty-five.'

'I wonder,' said Kit, moving away from the stove, 'how many houses there are numbered sixty-two or sixty-five in the Liverpool area?'

'There are two steps going up onto a verandah of very weathered wood. There is a door mat with "welcome" written on it. And there's another step at the front door that is dark blue, with paint coming away in little strips. There's a long, narrow opening for mail with brass around it. Very tarnished. However,' Gemma continued, 'the best thing is that there's a partly built boat just visible over the fence on the right-hand side of the house we're looking for.' She stood up. 'So there's a good chance we can find this place. But now, I've got to get home. I'm feeding a kestrel.'

Gemma looked more closely at her sister. In her excitement about the new break in the investigation, she hadn't really looked at Kit. 'You've been crying,' she said, noticing the red-rimmed eyes.

'Will's come back,' Kit said. 'He got my letter and he's gone into Rehab.'

'Oh Kittycat.' Gemma held her sister close. 'I'm so pleased. I'm so happy for you.'

'I still can't quite believe it,' Kit said. She pulled out a hankie and blew her nose. 'He's not out of the woods by any means,' she said. 'I must remember that the figures for recovery from heroin addiction aren't the best. But at least he's in with a chance.'

'Funny thing,' said Gemma. 'I was only remembering the other day how he used to come round to my place and just hang around. I never knew why he did that. We didn't have much in common. Not that I minded him being there,' she added. 'I just never understood why he'd want to spend time with me.'

Kit looked at her with eyes bright with tears. 'Because you didn't judge him.' She looked away. 'Like I did. Like his father did,' she said. 'You loved him as he was. He had nowhere else to go.'

A large police search ended when the State Protection Group busted 62 Overland Street, Kimberly Vale, Liverpool early the following morning. Next door to the large, unfinished boat in the driveway, they found a completely vacant house. Investigations into the owners of the house proved fruitless. They were a Hong Kong couple who lived overseas and the real estate agents who handled the letting said that the rent was paid monthly by postal orders from a Mr Smith.

The place was sealed off and searched from top to bottom. Boxloads of items were taken out for examination, including a notepad and pencil. But the letter written by Amy to her parents was gone.

TWENTY-EIGHT

Angie's phone rang late in the afternoon at the police centre. She was checking the progress of the investigation on the computer, noting whatever was still outstanding when Jason, one of the young detectives with Crime Scene, popped in. 'Just went to an autoerotic out at Liverpool. All done up in suspenders and girdle. Still not a pretty sight. Especially with a knife sticking out of his chest.'

Angie nodded absently and went back to her work. She noted that Bruno still hadn't reported the results of the doorknock at South Coogee. Then something made her stop checking the progress reports. Liverpool. A knife. She put her pen down. The two together may mean nothing, she thought, but some instinct alerted her. She went to the door. 'Jason,' she called. 'Who's handling it?'

'Mark Condon. Liverpool detectives.'

'Good,' said Angie. 'I've worked with him a few times.' She immediately rang Mark, who wasn't available, but she heard something that made her very interested indeed. 'We've got a knife here,' the policewoman on the other end of the line told her, 'with a very distinctive hook at the end.'

'I sent out a description of a knife like that,' said Angie. 'In connection with the murder investigation of the woman at Maroubra.'

'You know how many of those come in?' said the policewoman on the other end. 'We haven't got the time or the staff to follow up our own investigations properly, let alone chase after stuff from other areas.'

Angie knew it was true. 'Where's Mark?' she asked.

'He's with the others still at the crime scene. Unless he's gone to the morgue.'

'What's the address of the dead'un? I'll be there,' Angie said, scribbling it down. 'Soon as I can.'

She picked up Gemma in her car, and in less than two hours they pulled up outside the address Mark had given her. Gemma and Angie got out and walked past the police car outside and up the side passage to the main entrance. It was a square, ugly block of four flats. Angie knocked on the door of number three upstairs. A young constable wearing disposable overalls let them in.

'We're just about to cut him down,' said Mark, turning round to them, smiling as they walked into the flat. 'We left him up for a while. He's been a bit of a teaching aid.' His squat body looked overdressed in a dark suit and tie and his hair was much greyer than last time Angie had see him. He wore pink rubber gloves rather than thin disposable ones. 'Just about everyone's been and gone,' he paused, 'except for him.' He indicated a Crime Scene detective from Liverpool who was still squatting over his little suitcase, putting his phials and specimens away. Mark turned his attention back to the reason they were all gathered in the small flat with worn floral carpet and anonymous furniture. 'Don't see many deaths like this out here so I've been bringing people in to have a look before the contractors arrive.'

Gemma looked over her friend's shoulder and into the room. The grotesque figure, shocking in lace garter belt

and panties, dangled right in the centre of a large square doorway, turning slightly on the rope from which he hung, his head bowed onto his chest, over a large-cupped bra. One of his stockinged legs wore a high-heeled shoe; the other lay on the floor beneath him in a pool of blood. Just behind the hanging feet, a chair lay on its side. In the middle of his chest was a deep wound.

'Who is he?' Gemma asked.

'Fellow called Adrian Adams,' said Mark. 'He's been in and out of psych institutions for years. The local Mobile Treatment team know him very well.'

'Adrian Adams!' said Gemma, turning to her friend.

'Yes,' said Angie. 'The fruit loop with the baby in the bath. It's a small world.' Gemma remembered the boxes of photographs of Kit. 'Another one of your sister's *clients*.' Gemma didn't respond.

'At this stage, the doc doesn't like to say what killed him,' Mark was saying. 'We'll have a better idea after the PM.'

'I'm no doctor,' said Gemma, 'but may I draw your attention to a bloody great stab wound in his chest?'

'The doc isn't sure whether it's suicide or something else,' Mark explained. 'We're still treating it as a suspicious death at this stage.'

'It sure looks like homicide,' said Gemma. 'What do you think?'

Mark answered her by turning to Angie. 'Remember that young bloke we were called out to at Padstow? The one we found with a bloody great knife sticking out of his chest and the local guys were treating it as murder?'

Angie nodded, explaining to Gemma. 'It turned out he'd done it himself,' she said. 'Mark and me found the different attempts at the suicide note screwed up in his bedroom wastepaper bin.'

'When you've been in the game for as long as I have,' said Mark, 'you find that all the things they say in the books about how it's impossible for people to kill themselves in certain ways are wrong. I've seen everything. Talking of stabbings,' he added, pointing with a pale-gloved finger. 'That's what came out of that hole in his chest.'

Angie walked over to a table where a bloody knife lay on a piece of fabric. She leaned closer to see it better. The serrations on one side of its blade ended in a little turned-up point. '*That's my knife!*' she said. 'I'll lay any odds that's the one that killed Bianca Perrault.' She felt a thrill of recognition and satisfaction that her instincts had been on track.

'We can't be sure of that,' said Mark.

Angie hardly heard him as he picked up his mobile to ring the contractors again. Angie tried to make sense of it. 'We've got this knife here with one man, and her pink panties with another one.' She shook her head and pulled out a cigarette. 'Killers One and Two? I don't know what's going on here. The Turkish water cats start looking better.'

'Don't be silly,' said Gemma. 'Think about it. If this joker in the high heels is one of them, he's Killer One, the little creep with the camera and the perving who only killed when he was interrupted. Then he teams up with someone very nasty and now they've split up because Amy got away. Adrian Adams has offed himself like a third of all murderers do. And the other one's still out there.'

'Don't you contaminate my crime scene,' Mark said as Angie lit up.

She ignored him. 'I want the details on that knife asap,' she said. 'When's the post-mortem?'

'Probably this afternoon. I don't think we've got a backlog.' He pulled his gloves off. 'We're talking to everyone in the building. He only had one visitor. A man who came here

a couple of times.' Angie and Gemma looked at each other. Killer Two? 'We're working on a description at the moment,' Mark continued. 'Someone's talking to his mother, trying to get names from her. He doesn't seem to have had any friends or acquaintances.'

'No,' said Angie. 'He does – did – his socialising around four in the morning. Let me know the result of the PM the minute you get it.' She considered. 'It could be a self-administered knife blow just prior to toppling off the chair or it's possible someone stabbed him and then strung him up.' She considered further. 'Or after he strung himself up.'

'Not for us to say really. But look around you,' said Mark. 'Everything's hunky dory. No sign of a struggle. Would you let someone do that to you without a fight?' Gemma surveyed the place. The yellow lounge and chairs, the television, a formica table with four chairs still around it, the fifth now lying on its side near the dead man. Neat, bland, perfectly in order. Except for the extraordinary grotesque hanging from the door jamb.

The Liverpool Crime Scene detective slipped the knife into a labelled cardboard cylinder, pressed the lid on firmly and stood up. 'We were called out to a guy once that the water police hauled out of Glebe Bay,' he said. 'He'd taken rat poison, weighed himself down with chains, shot himself and then toppled off the end of the wharf.'

'Let me guess,' Angie exhaled. 'Could it be suicide?'

'Actually, no,' said the detective. 'He practically fell into the water police boat. They raced him to the nearest ICU and he was up and out in a few days.'

Garry Copeland walked into Angie's office two hours later, just as Gemma was about to leave. 'Mark Condon rang from

Liverpool while you were out,' he said to Angie. 'And I've just been talking to the PM doctor. There's no doubt that the knife they found stuck in the chest of the suspicious death down Liverpool way is the same one that killed Bianca Perrault. Amy gave us a positive ID on Adrian Adams. She says he was the man she saw. Poor girl started shaking and crying the minute she saw the photograph, even when we told her he was well and truly dead. The boss wants us to wind down the investigation. We've got the murder weapon. We've got one killer accounted for. We keep looking for Clive Mindell and grab him when he shows up. It's only a matter of time.'

But Angie shook her head. 'What if the doctor comes up with murder rather than suicide?'

'Well,' said Garry. 'Funny you should mention that. The doctor said the heart can keep going for a while. That he could have got himself all rigged up in his lace, stabbed himself, and bled a lot after he'd jumped off the chair. Or that someone else could have stabbed him while he was hanging – taking advantage of the situation as it were. The angle of the injury is ambiguous – could have been self-inflicted. Or not. The only prints on the knife are his.'

'In either case that'd be expected.'

'Yes,' Garry Copeland agreed. 'But I feel we've broken its back. The case, I mean.'

Gemma shrugged. 'I'm not so sure,' she said.

Angie frowned. 'The boss's already told me to wind down the investigation.'

On the way out of the room, Copeland stopped in his tracks. 'By the way,' he said, 'Mark Condon told me to tell you that they found boxes of stuff when they went through Adrian Adams' things. Photographs of women taken with long range cameras.'

Gemma felt the hairs on the back of her neck stiffen. 'He had an obsession with my sister,' she said. 'We found boxes of her all over another flat of his.'

'Maybe you should go and look through them, see if there's anyone you know.'

'Yes,' she said. 'I'll do that.'

TWENTY-NINE

Kit picked up the phone. 'Hullo?' she said.

'It's me. Clive.'

'Clive? Where are you?'

'Don't be crazy. I can't tell you that. Please believe me when I say I had nothing to do with Bianca Perrault's death. Or the abduction of her sister.'

Kit waited. On the other end of the line, she could hear the distressed breathing of her caller.

'I'm writing to that policewoman in charge of the case. I'm explaining how I got those panties. Maybe she'll believe me then. I've been holed up like an animal for days. I can't come to therapy. I can't go anywhere. I don't know what to do.'

'Clive, how did you get those panties?'

'Exactly like I said. I found them in the wheelie bin outside the girl's house. I was there watching all the police activity the night the older girl was taken.' His voice became more excited. 'That's it! I can prove it. A young policeman told me to go away or he'd charge me with something. He'll remember that. He'll remember me. And the wheelie bin was there in the driveway near the road. You tell that policewoman to find that copper.'

Kit thought about it. Clive had been there, watching the police activity early that morning. It only made Clive look

worse, more complicit, more involved. Even the Victorians knew that killers are drawn to the scene of the crime.

'Clive. The best thing is to come forward. If you're innocent—'

'See? Even you don't believe me.'

'*Because* you're innocent,' Kit said. 'You must come forward.' But he'd already rung off.

The three women sat around the table in Kit's kitchen. On a big platter in the middle was a pile of buttered home-made bread and several containers of jams.

'We've got Killer One either suicided, or murdered, probably by Killer Two. Which means,' said Angie, 'we've still got a very dangerous man on the loose.'

'Maybe it's Killer Two suicided or murdered. Maybe Adrian Adams was the dominant personality.'

'I don't think so,' said Angie. 'Killer Two is the more violent. From what I know about him, everything points to Adrian Adams being the clothes wanker. We know for sure he had an obsession with peeping. It'd be unlikely the other way round.' She turned to Kit. 'We've got some information about Clive Mindell's CV,' she said. 'As far as we know, he's never done any security work.' She looked disappointed at this. 'He's never said anything about that sort of work?' Kit shook her head. 'No,' she said. 'He's always been in managerial jobs. Since he was a young boy.' He'd trained at Woolworths, Kit remembered.

'American data is very different,' Angie said. 'But the sort of profile that fits the guy we're looking for often mentions a background in security work. Gives them a chance to carry a weapon, beat people up, stand over people. That sort of thing. Remember this little charmer is all about domination and power.' Kit thought of Clive and his need to dominate.

'But isn't it just as usual to find a history of unemployment?' Gemma asked.

'That's true,' said Angie. 'And it's also possible that if your operator is right with his gut feeling, the guy in the white Toyota is the one we're looking for. He'd easily get a flashing blue light so that he could pull Amy and the dead boyfriend over.' She stood up and went to the door. 'Mind you, Clive Mindell could have done all those things without any background in security work. May I smoke?' she asked Kit.

'Stay by the door and you're fine,' Kit replied.

'And another thing,' said Angie, putting her cigarette lighter back in her pocket. 'Killer Two might just as easily be someone in employment. Which leads me to my point. The man we're looking for might be employed right now in the security industry. Someone like that has plenty of free range with his time. He's on the road all day.'

Gemma thought of Spinner and his precise, intelligent reports. Of Noel and his dogged, never-let-up-on-them determination. They called in several times a day to let her know where they were. Or she checked on them. She knew two operators in the security industry who were well and truly off the hook. 'What is your point?' she asked Angie.

'Try this on,' said her friend, exhaling and waving the smoke outside. 'We only have Spinner's word about that Toyota. What if he's the killer? He'd worked out which unit the Perrault women were in. He could have seen Amy sneak out to meet her boyfriend. What if the white Toyota is all bullshit and Skinner just picked some innocent driver's rego?'

Gemma was stunned. Then she felt sick. 'No,' she said. 'It's just not possible. It's a crazy idea.'

'Crazy ideas are what we deal in, Gemma. Crazy people with crazy ideas that they carry out.'

Gemma continued to shake her head. 'I *know* Spinner,' she said.

'Like you know Clive Mindell?' Angie shot at Kit. 'Seems there's a hell of a lot of knowing round here.'

'Angie,' said Kit. 'I thought you were positive that Clive Mindell and Killer Two are one and the same. I got the idea the investigation was winding down because all you need to do now is pick Clive up.' She paused. 'So why are you conjecturing a whole new scenario?'

'Because everything's up in the air and I don't know anything for sure,' said Angie.

'I've had a couple of calls from Clive,' said Kit. 'No,' she said, pre-empting any question, 'he didn't say where he was. But he was terrified and distressed. He wasn't cocky or triumphant at all. It's not him, Angie.'

Angie crushed the cigarette underfoot, picked it up and looked around for the kitchen bin. She threw it in and pushed the hair away from her face with both hands. She looked drawn and tired. 'What do you think, Gem?' she asked. 'You used to be a good cop.'

Gemma looked down at a mark on the table. It looked a bit like an eye. Idly, she traced its outline with a finger. 'I'll tell you what I think,' she said. 'I think Adrian Adams was the clothes wanker who killed when he was interrupted. I think he then teamed up with Killer Two who murdered Bianca and would have murdered Amy except for her amazing guts and intelligence. I think that Killer Two then murdered Adrian Adams. He'd be a liability. Unstable, unreliable. Killer Two might even believe that Amy's escape was because of him. Somehow – and I doubt if we'll ever find out how – Killer Two knew what Adrian Adams liked to do from time to time in the autoerotic line. And while Adrian is least expecting it, wham, Killer Two drives that knife into

his chest between the sternum and the ribs. And there you are. It looks like a suicide.' She looked around at the others. 'You see, he doesn't know that we know about his existence. He's set things up to look like we've got the killer the whole state is looking for. But then Amy got away and she knows there were two of them. So that's spoiled his cover.' She looked up at Angie, who was listening intently.

Kit looked from one to the other. 'What is his next move?' she asked.

Angie looked to Gemma, then back to Kit. 'Hard to say,' she said.

'Amy getting away from him will be a real blow to his sense of domination and control,' Kit reminded them. 'He'll be boiling to punish her for escape. He'll be enraged over that.'

'Don't killers of that type also hang around the graves of their victims?' Gemma asked.

Angie nodded. 'I reckon he'll be very interested in Bianca's funeral. Remember he sees himself as part of the family in some ghastly way. So I've managed to squeeze extra personnel out of the boss to cover that at least.'

Gemma thought of the graveyard scene. The burial of the girl he had destroyed; the chance to get another look at the younger sister who had escaped him. 'His' family gathering round his handiwork. It would be very tempting for him. Especially now when he thought he was completely off the hook. If they could enhance that somehow. She suddenly remembered an overseas case she'd read about and the way a trap was baited to catch a murderer.

'Hey!' Gemma jumped in excitement. 'Let's make sure he's there!' Kit and Angie looked at her. 'Let's send him an invitation,' she said.

'What do you mean?' said Angie.

Gemma's face was alive. 'I've just thought of a way we can encourage him to come. If the Perraults agree.'

Angie said, 'Tell us.'

Gemma outlined her plan. The others listened intently. 'Let's throw everything we've got at this,' she concluded. In the silence that followed, she could feel their willingness.

Angie stood up. 'Let's do it,' she said.

Within the hour, Angie had talked with her contacts at the *Mirror* and the *Telegraph* and they'd talked to their respective editors. Both had late editions still to print. She spoke to journalists on the television channels. The *Sydney Morning Herald* ran the story the next morning that police were confident that the killer who was terrorising Sydney was dead. No names were released but there was a photograph of Detective Sergeant Angie McDonald, out of focus at her request, talking to Bianca's father. Beneath the photo was another story. 'Security tight at murder victim's funeral' ran the headline.

> The family of murdered Bianca Perrault, whose funeral is to be on Wednesday, asked that people respect their desire for privacy today. Seventeen-year-old Bianca Perrault's body was found dumped in bushland near Windsor last week after being abducted from her house. Her younger sister Amy was also abducted later but managed to escape. The grieving family will recruit private security manpower to ensure that the funeral does not become a media circus, Mr Perrault said today. 'We wish to be left in peace to say a final farewell to our beautiful daughter. We don't want a police presence.' Mr Perrault added that he had no criticism of the police investigation and only praise for individual members. Mr Perrault further said he

would personally be choosing the security personnel for the job.

The next day, many security firms contacted Mr Perrault's office. He thanked them for their interest but said he was handling this himself. Several individual operators also phoned. Using his work office, Mr Perrault made appointment times for all of them. Altogether seven men turned up. As soon as he'd carried out the interviews, Mr Perrault faxed through the details of the seven men's names, birthdates and work histories to Angie.

THIRTY

Angie and Jason were checking the seven men through the COPS system when Angie's mobile started ringing. She snatched it up, listened intently, wrote down another phone number, rang off and hurried to the door of the Strike Force room.

'That was Colleen from the Institute.' Everyone looked up from what they were doing. The atmosphere of the room was continuing to change. Now it was charged with hope; the hard work was starting to pay off. 'You all recall there was a notepad on which Amy wrote a letter to her family?' Angie said. 'We sent the notepad over there. Even though we've never found the letter, the people at the Institute have been putting the page underneath it through the ESDA machine.'

Gemma remembered seeing the Electro Static Detection Apparatus machine and how it could pick up and enhance the tiniest indentations on a surface, using darker and darker tones until it was possible to read whole words that were only the faintest impression.

'They've come up with part of a shopping list,' Angie was saying, 'and a phone number for us.' She looked around. 'I'll have to see if the boss will let us put a trace on it.'

'Could Amy identify him from his voice?' Jason asked. 'He must have spoken to her.'

'She told us he spoke very little. And when he did, it was in a whisper.' That thought sent a shiver down Gemma's spine.

Angie left the room but returned shortly, looking relieved. 'He's going to okay it.' She looked at Jason. 'Ring Harvey Urquart at Telstra. Get him to put an urgent trace on this number. We need to know whose it is. As soon as possible, please, tell him. It could be very important.'

Jason nodded and picked up the piece of paper with the telephone number on it. 'By the way,' he said as he left the room, 'the first four guys applying for the security work at the funeral are cleanskins.'

Angie looked around. 'Bruno, I want you to check out these other three names. See if they come up clean. If not, give me a detailed account of any previous convictions.' Bruno didn't move.

'In your own time, Bruno, of course,' Angie added drily. She waited in silence until Bruno finally left the room.

'Okay,' she said. 'I want Colin to come with me while we work out the way to keep tabs on this funeral,' she said. 'We'll need to liaise with the SPG. We want the cemetery secured because Amy could be exposed to the killer again. Even if our killer doesn't take the bait and come as a security worker, we can watch out for him on the fringes of the funeral in case he turns up to stickybeak.' The phone rang and Angie grabbed it.

'Harvey Urquart. Telstra security for DS Angie McDonald. You wanted the details of a number.'

'Yes,' she said, grabbing a pen. 'Go for it.'

'The mobile belongs to a Jeremy Mintner. Here's the address.'

'I'm on my way,' said Angie, scribbling down the details. 'Kellyville?' she queried. Then she turned to Gemma, who was also half out of her seat. 'Come on, girl. We've got something.'

Kellyville is an odd mix of battlers' blocks littered with old car bodies and collapsed chook runs, rubbing up next to flash project homes on small acreages and smart new housing estates. 'Here it is,' said Angie, as they came to the mock tudor that was 349, with its fake black beams trim and large, disproportionate windows.

They left the vehicle on the road and walked up the long bricked path to knock on the door of Mr Jeremy Mintner's house. A white-painted tyre, split to look like a swan, hid the garden tap and more painted tyres formed semi-circular hoops that edged the garden plots. Gemma and Angie looked at each other. 'None of this feels right,' said Gemma. Through the textured glass panels of the door they could see someone coming down the hall. The door was opened by a cosy elderly woman in an apron; behind her wafted the smell of freshly cooked cake.

Angie opened her wallet and showed her warrant card. 'Angie McDonald,' she said. 'I'm working on the murder of Bianca Perrault.' The woman blinked and swallowed. The girl's name was a household word by now, thought Angie. 'And this is Gemma Lincoln. We're in the area making inquiries. Is Mr Jeremy Mintner home?'

The woman looked startled, looking from one to the other of the two young women who stood on her doorstep. 'Yes,' she said. 'That's my husband. I'll just get him for you.'

Angie and Gemma looked at each other as Mrs Mintner, this time without her apron, came back, followed by a frail old man. 'I don't know what they want, dear,' she was

saying. 'Put a cardigan on, for goodness' sakes. You'll catch your death.'

'Please come in,' said Mr Mintner, ushering them into the house. 'Come down the back into the sun room. It's warmer there.' The two women followed him through the house to a glassed-in verandah where grevilleas and bottlebrush bushes grew against the glass, and New Holland honeyeaters swayed on the blossoms. 'Please sit down,' he said, indicating an old velvet sofa.

'I believe you have a mobile phone,' said Angie, ignoring his invitation, fishing out the bit of paper with the number written on it and passing it to him.

'That's right,' he said, checking the number. 'That's my number. Eileen bought it for me last Christmas. Just before we went away on the cruise, wasn't it, Eileen?' Mrs Mintner had joined them.

'What's this about?' she asked.

'We're investigating a murder and an abduction,' said Angie. 'Bianca Perrault and her younger sister. This phone number was written down on a notepad taken from the house where the younger girl was held.'

Mr Mintner looked as if he'd been struck by lightning. 'But who would do that?' he said. 'Why would someone like that write down my number?' His bewilderment was touching, thought Gemma. He seemed older and more transparent now with the colour drained from his face.

'But that's terrible,' said his wife. 'Why would our number be involved? I wouldn't write down my own number. I might be getting on but I've still got my marbles.'

'I'm sure that's the case,' said Gemma. 'But we need to know who else might have written it. I think you'd better sit down, sir,' she added. Mr Mintner looked as if he might faint. The thought of him being Killer Two was completely

impossible. Amy Perrault weighed more than he did, and he must have been eighty if he was a day, Gemma thought. He'd keel over with a gentle shove.

'Who else has the number?' Gemma asked.

The Mintners looked at each other. 'No one,' Mrs Mintner said. 'No one has it. We just use it between ourselves. To ring home if one of us is out and something happens. Like I can't get a cab or something and I don't want him to be worrying because I'm late getting home. It's very handy for that sort of thing. You know what it's like trying to find a public telephone.'

'So no one has the number apart from yourselves?' Angie looked around. 'What about your family?'

'They just ring us here. On the ordinary phone. Dad didn't want anyone to know about it. He thought they'd tease him.'

'They would too,' he said smartly. 'You know what that Graham is like.'

Angie and Gemma looked at each other in disappointed silence.

'Well,' Angie said after a pause. 'We're sorry to have troubled you. But if anything comes to mind. Anyone else who may have had access to this number, please ring me.' She handed her card to the old man.

'Of course I will,' he said. 'But there's no one else.'

The two women left the house. 'Someone took that number and wrote it down,' said Angie, 'on a notepad that ended up in a crime scene.'

'Maybe the old fellow will remember something,' said Gemma. But she felt drained. There had been some hope and now they were back where they started.

'I want to clear something up with Mark Condon,' said Gemma as they got back into the car. 'At Liverpool. Do you mind?'

Angie glanced at her watch. 'Okay,' she said. 'As long as you're quick.'

'As I can be,' Gemma said.

At Liverpool Police Station she went to the Exhibit Room with Mark Condon. Behind her, she could hear Angie's voice as she and Mark walked down the corridor. 'I don't want this bastard spooked,' Angie was saying. 'I want him soothed into a false sense of security. But he's very clever and I want to lock him into this murder and abduction with as much physical evidence as possible.'

Apart from my sister, I haven't heard that much passion in a woman's voice since I left the job, Gemma thought.

In the Exhibit Room with its shelves of goods and evidence, Mark led her to several large, labelled cardboard packing cases. 'This is the stuff we took from Adrian Adams' flat.'

Gemma started going through it. She pulled out a handful of women's clothes, and was about to shove it back in again when she saw the yellow skirt. Under that was the white halter top. Bo Bayliss' outfit. She put them back again and pulled out another box, this one filled with photographs. It soon became clear to her that Adrian Adams' obsession with invading women's lives with his camera lens hadn't stopped when he started slipping into their houses. She pulled pictures out, shuffling them like cards. There were many pictures of the accounts clerk from Maroubra, some showing her gardening outside her ground floor unit, others in a bikini sunbaking in what she imagined was the privacy of the backyard. Photos of Bianca taken with a long distance lens showed her shadowy in her bedroom.

It wasn't till she was almost halfway through the second box that Gemma stopped in shock. There was Kit, in a

shot taken through her kitchen window at Gordon's Bay. Gemma shuddered. Her blood ran cold as she imagined him bringing his new associate one night along the dark path around Gordon's Bay to Kit's house. Maybe he had. Maybe the grilles going up had thwarted them and Kit had remained safe and sound in her house, barred against the evil that moved around her garden in the night. And then she thought of the man in the green Ford. Maybe he had been just a perv, wanting to follow her, give her a bit of misery for a while until he got bored. Maybe he'd thought she'd given off some vibe of interest. She called Angie over, who took a long look and slowly shook her head.

Angie dropped Gemma back at her place. Returning to the police centre, Angie reviewed the progress of the investigation again. She frowned.

'Where's Bruno?' she asked. She finally located him down in Ballistics, where his laugh could be heard all the way down the corridor. He whirled around at her approach and the two men to whom he'd been speaking looked uneasy. He's been talking about me, she knew, backbiting and laughing at me.

'Those other three names I gave you to clear up. Have you done it?'

'Of course,' he said in his patronising way. 'Nothing much there. Mostly just traffic.'

'I'd appreciate it if you'd report to me. Names and records. That's what I asked for.'

'Yes, *ma'am*,' he said. Back in her office he stood at the door. 'We haven't got anything on Larry Hogan,' he said, 'apart from traffic. The other two, Alan Bentley and a Roger Poole. They've both had a few brushes with the law.'

'Like what?' Angie said.

'Bentley's been done for assault. Six months nine years ago. Nothing since then apart from traffic. Poole's had a couple of Apprehended Violence Orders and breach of AVO. That's all.'

'That's *all*?' she said. 'Who took out the AVOs?'

'His wife.' Bruno shrugged. 'Some silly bitch making trouble.'

'Right,' said Angie. 'Thank you for your insights into domestic violence. You might be good enough to bring me a printout of Roger Poole's record.'

'But I'm telling you. He's only down for domestics.'

'A man who threatens women is exactly what we're looking for. Just do it.'

After a moment he returned, slammed the piece of paper down on the desk and walked out. Angie felt herself shaking with anger. Bruno had perfected a sort of insolence and insubordination that evaporated the moment she tried to describe it and write it down. If she lay down the law to him just as a male superior would do, he'd be just as likely to patronise her as being premenstrual.

She picked up the printout and started to glance through it. She looked more closely. There were three AVOs and one breach of the order, but no further action. The AVOs had been taken out by two separate women, the most recent being less than a year ago. This Roger Poole definitely had a problem. If Clive Mindell didn't show up at the funeral, or any other person taking an interest without any legitimate reason to be there, Roger Poole just might be someone to keep an eye on. She sighed. It wasn't much. But it was all they had at the moment. She phoned Charles Perrault.

'Employ all of them,' she said. *Anyone* who applied for that job could be suspect, she knew.

'Do you think he'll be one of them?'

'It's possible,' said Angie. 'If Amy is willing, I want her to be with you when you give each man his pay. Just so she can hear his voice.'

'She'll be willing. I can safely speak for her on this matter. She's got more courage than either of us. I can't even bear the thought of him being anywhere near her – looking at her.'

'Charles, I understand. But you're going to be surrounded by armed police officers. No harm can come to her. And we're going to be watching everyone there. Perpetrators of this kind often like to be part of the funeral in some way.' She paused. 'He might just be a passer-by.'

Late next morning, Angie wound up the briefing. 'I've managed to beg, borrow and steal fifteen people, mostly offering out of the goodness of their hearts,' she said, 'who'll be in and around the cemetery.' She indicated the map. 'They'll be watching for anyone taking more than a passing interest.' Gemma glanced at her watch. 'We've got two hours,' Angie said, 'before the funeral starts. Let's get this rolling.'

As everyone left the room, Gemma pulled out her mobile. 'Spinner,' she said a moment later when he answered. 'We've got an urgent job.'

'But I've got the Blacktown thief,' he said. 'She's loading stuff into her car. In broad daylight. That's how she does it.'

'She'll do it again. Come in now. I need you.'

She gave him the address of the cemetery and explained the situation. 'I want you and Noel in position there as soon as possible. Contact Noel when I ring off. Tell him to look like you're part of the funeral.'

She rang her own number and listened to the messages. There were seven. Three were potential new customers. One

message, from Richard Cross, made her blush. She rang him back but his receptionist said he was out. I'm neglecting my own job, she thought to herself as she scribbled down the other messages. But this *is* my job, she realised.

Gemma drove home, noting the high-flying cirrus mares' tails indicating instability and a possible change on the way.

THIRTY-ONE

Gemma wore her black sheath dress with a black jacket over it, to cover her bare shoulders. The sky had clouded over suddenly and a few spots of rain fell. Beside them, the Pacific heaved and crashed on the rocks and Gemma thought she could feel the ground reverberate under her feet as massive waves dissolved into surf and spray on the side of the cliffs.

Two of the casual security operators hired by Charles Perrault stood on duty at the cemetery's main gates, their brief to keep the press away. The other three, among them the violently disposed Roger Poole, were to stay with the main group, expelling any uninvited or merely curious bystanders. Above her, another kestrel hung in a holding pattern. Her heart was racing with excitement. This was the biggest job of her life. Ahead of her she could see the Perraults, the husband with his arm around his weeping wife, Amy straight and tall beside them. She had insisted on coming to her sister's funeral, despite her parents' fears and the fact that the killer might well turn up.

Gemma hardly recognised Noel in his dark suit standing back a little from the group of mourners, his hands neatly tucked together in front of him. He looked, she thought, like a rather dignified undertaker. And Spinner looked a

treat as well in a dark pinstripe, standing up on one of the higher points of the rise in which the Perraults had their plot. The gravedigger had only made a small hole; Bianca's ashes were joining the bones of her maternal grandparents, both dead in the 'eighties. Angie watched Jason, who gave her the briefest nod in the direction of a moustached man in mirrored sunglasses. In the group of fifty or so people who stood around Angie moved towards Gemma and whispered in her ear, simply looking like one mourner murmuring words of comfort to another. 'That's Poole over there. The one with the moustache.'

Roger Poole looked like an advertisement from *Soldier of Fortune*. He was kitted out in quasi-police style, complete with police belt with accoutrements dangling from it. Gemma bowed her head and put her own sunglasses on, the better to study him, as if wishing to hide eyes inflamed with grief. Heavy moustache and mirror sunglasses hid most of his face.

A couple of spits of rain made parts of her field of vision spotty and gulls circled and screamed overhead. Angie returned to stand beside her. 'I've checked with Mr Perrault,' she said. 'There's no one here who isn't family or friend. Except for the hired hands.'

'But he could still be watching.' Gemma thought of her automatic zoom binos and how they could see into people's houses, cars and backyards from a distance. 'He could be in a parked vehicle up there.' She indicated the high ground to the south of the cemetery where several cars were parked.

'We've checked them all. They're empty.'

'Could be set up in a building.'

'Maybe he's here,' said Angie, indicating the heavy figure in the mirrored sunglasses. Gemma took a few leisurely steps as if to hear the priest's words better, so that she was

standing just behind the sharp little figure of Spinner in the pinstripe suit. 'We return her to you, heavenly Father,' the priest was saying. 'We leave her in your safekeeping until we meet again.' The sound of Mrs Perrault's weeping was heartrending and Gemma felt her own eyes fill. This crazy world, she thought. Did you make it like this, God? Are you some sort of idiot? A benevolent six-year-old could have organised things better. Or are we absolutely on our own, and making our own hell as well?

Soon it was over. Gemma watched while Mr Perrault gave the casual security people their envelopes. Amy stood close beside him. Mr Perrault turned to where Angie was standing and slowly shook his head. Amy hadn't been able to identify them from their voices.

Gemma turned to Spinner. 'I'm going to follow the guy with the mo. Wait here and see if anyone turns up later.'

'I'll sit up there,' said Spinner, indicating the road, 'and watch the grave.' He turned to leave.

As the funeral group started moving away, Gemma watched. The man in the mirrored sunglasses and moustache went to the grave as if to pay his respects. She felt Angie bump her in the side.

'Look at that,' she whispered. 'Must have read his profile.' He almost knelt at the grave of the murdered girl, leaned over, and snapped a souvenir rosebud from a wreath.

Gemma held her breath. Angie was right. This sort of souveniring was straight out of the FBI textbooks. The two women waited, seemingly chatting, until their target walked past them, pocketing the rosebud, then they followed him up the hill towards the main cemetery gate. As the two women approached the entrance, one of the other security officers was still standing there, a sentinel at the grand Victorian wrought-iron gates.

'Sad business, ma'am,' he said to Angie, wiping a raindrop from his face. 'I recall your name from the newspaper story.' Gemma barely glanced at him, worried that she'd lose Roger Poole.

Angie acknowledged him briefly with a nod and he moved away a little to wait for the main body of mourners to make it up the rise. Gemma looked around for Roger Poole. He was getting into a four-wheel-drive monster, high up off the ground.

'No white Toyota,' said Gemma.

'He could have sold it. Stay on him,' Angie said. 'We want him to take us home with him. I want twenty-four-hour surveillance on this character.'

'I'll keep an eye on him, too,' Gemma volunteered.

Angie didn't speak, but her gratitude showed in her smile as she squeezed her friend's arm.

Gemma followed Roger Poole to his neat little one-storeyed terrace in Petersham. She parked across the road a good way back on the opposite side. Poole got out and swaggered into his house.

The late afternoon traffic was quite heavy even on this suburban street. Cautiously, she made her way to the house next door to Poole's. A young woman with a baby in her arms answered her knock.

'Hi,' said Gemma, wishing Spinner was doing this. 'The bloke who lives next door,' she said in a bright voice. 'That's not Roger Poole, is it? I went to school with him!'

'I think that's his name,' said the young woman with her lightly accented voice.

'I'm sorry to trouble you,' Gemma continued, 'but I just knocked on his door and he wasn't in.'

The young woman frowned. 'I'm sure I just heard his car pull up. Maybe you should try again.'

'Yes, I will,' Gemma said, turning away. 'I had a big crush on him when we were kids. He was my first boyfriend.'

They chatted for a while, but Gemma didn't get much more information except that he had a dog who kept the street awake some nights and that he worked as a security guard. She went back to her car and leaned back in the seat. In her rear vision mirror, she could see two detectives whose faces were vaguely familiar from the Strike Force meetings, sitting in an old Sigma sedan some distance behind her. She realised how tired she was. I think I'll leave it to the wallopers for a while, she thought, switching the ignition on.

On the drive home, Gemma felt tired and sad. Missing Steve, missing Taxi, suspecting that Richard Cross was just a handsome distraction. She ran a bath and was just about to get into it when her phone rang. Wrapping the towel around herself, she answered it.

'Hullo,' he said. 'I'm hoping we can get together again.'

'That would be lovely,' she said, and the sadness eased a little.

'When?'

'Tomorrow?'

'Dinner?'

'Yes.'

'I'll pick you up at seven.'

She realised her heart was beating as she lay back in her bath, soaking. She examined her legs and decided they needed shaving. It felt good to have another date with a desirable man. She went over their conversation and lovemaking of the other night and remembered that she'd done most of the talking. She vowed to be more silent tomorrow. To let him

speak of himself so that she could start filling in the picture of this successful, self-made man. A man who doesn't want to revisit the past like I do. The pressing needs of Angie's current investigation had taken precedence over her father's case. Her legs were silky smooth when she lay back again, just floating in the warm water. She recalled that other bath, and the slamming of the bathroom door at the Tusculum Hotel; the beginning of this whole, dreadful sequence of events that she was now considering. The dead end they'd hit in the investigation. The fear that the killer would attack again wherever and whenever he wanted. And soon. She ran a bit more hot water. Many of her best ideas came up in the bath, she recalled, as she lay back again. She revised the investigation so far. Nothing seemed to lead anywhere. The phone number the ESDA machine had highlighted was the only real lead they'd had and it had fizzled out. But there it was.

Even though the number had appeared under the letter written by brave Amy Perrault, the Mintners were adamant that no one else knew it. It just didn't make sense. She felt a surge of energy and decided to drive out and visit the Mintners again. She'd found in her policing days that people sometimes remember details *after* they've been questioned and the subject matter brought to their attention once more. And the Mintners' phone number was written on a shopping list in a house where Amy Perrault had almost died. They had to be connected somehow.

Mrs Mintner was tending her roses in the front garden when Gemma arrived and graciously ushered her inside for a cuppa. No, she said, they'd racked their brains since the policewoman's visit and there was no one who had that number. 'People sometimes take a number down wrongly, you know,' said her husband, putting down his tea cup. 'I've done that a couple of times myself.'

Gemma suddenly had an inspiration. 'Look,' she said. 'This is who we're looking for. A man. We don't know who he is but we know quite a few things about him already.' The Mintners looked from one to the other. 'This man is aged between twenty-five and thirty-five,' said Gemma. 'He's a bit of a loner. He's had quite a few different jobs over the years, but he seems to find it hard to settle to anything. He doesn't seem to have much luck with women. He's outwardly shy and polite, and probably overweight or unattractive in some way. Maybe acne scars. He has difficulty with people. He's withdrawn, he isolates himself. He could well be above average intelligence but you'd never know that because he doesn't seem to have the necessary skills to get along with other people. He probably has a fascination for weapons, he might even have a gun or knife collection, or both. He moves around a bit. Maybe boards in rooming houses. He does odd jobs. He might have had a job once as a guard or with some form of security work. Just lately, he'll be very edgy and nervous. Might be drinking heavily. Might be talking about the cases of the two young women, especially about the one called Bianca. Going on about it to anyone who'll listen.'

Mr and Mrs Mintner looked at each other, then at Gemma. 'That'd be Larry,' said Mrs Mintner.

'Yes, that certainly sounds like Larry,' her husband agreed.

'Larry?' said Gemma, sitting straight up as an icy surge of excitement thrilled her. 'Who's he? Larry who?' Her pen was poised over her notepad.

'Oh Larry—' Mr Mintner looked at his wife for help. 'This is stupid of me. I just can't recall his other name. Heavens, we've known him a few years now. On and off. He does the odd bit of gardening or gives Eileen a hand sometimes with moving furniture around.'

'But how did you contact him? Did you have a phone number?'

Mr Mintner shook his head. 'No. He'd just pop up out of the blue and knock on the door. Eileen would make a date and he'd come back.'

His wife interrupted. 'Jeremy was in hospital last week and I stayed over with him. Larry did some work out there in the garden. You can see where he's done quite a good job clearing some of that grevillea. When we got home I made him a cup of tea and he was talking about that poor girl who was killed. Saying he wondered if the police would ever catch the man. He talked a lot about her. Gave me the willies.' The Mintners looked at each other.

'What else did he say?' said Gemma.

'He said a man like that must be pretty smart.'

'Do you have any idea where he lives?' asked Gemma, very interested now.

Mr Mintner looked troubled. 'I think he's been staying out at a caravan park along Colo way.'

'Who else has he worked for? Is there anyone who might know how to contact him?'

The old couple looked at each other. 'I don't know, really,' said Mrs Mintner. 'I'm sorry we can't be more helpful. We keep to ourselves and don't get about all that much these days.'

Gemma stood up. She wanted to be out of there, to tell Angie. 'Thank you very much. This has been very helpful. You'll be hearing from Angie McDonald again.'

'We'll do anything we can to help,' said the woman. 'I just wish I could remember his last name.' Then the expression on her face changed. 'Oh dear,' she said, slapping a hand to her mouth.

'What?' said Gemma, alerted by the change.

'I remember now. I *did* give him the mobile telephone number. Just in case he wanted to check about anything in the garden. When I was away at the hospital. He wrote it down on a notepad.'

Snap, thought Gemma. There it is, the connection. Larry Someone was looking very much like a person of interest to the police. She felt elated. She thanked the Mintners and almost ran out of the house.

On the freeway from Parramatta she rang Angie, who wasn't at her desk. 'Just stepped out for a minute,' said a voice Gemma didn't know.

'When she steps back in,' said Gemma, 'give her this message.' She passed on the first name the Mintners had given her. 'Tell her the Mintners at Kellyville – she'll know what I'm talking about – gave their mobile number to an odd jobs man called Larry.'

'I'll let her know.'

By the time she got to the police centre, after battling through peak hour traffic, Angie had also just got in and was reading the message slips on her desk. She looked up as Gemma walked into her office.

'What else?' Angie's green eyes were wide. 'We've got a Larry,' she said, eyes wide with excitement, 'among the men who contacted Mr Perrault. Bruno said he was clean.' The two women looked at each other. Then Angie pulled out the folder in which she kept all her details. 'Here they are. Larry Hagen,' she said. 'Let's have another look at him.'

She typed his name into her screen while Gemma looked over her friend's shoulder. 'Got him. DOB 12.11.63,' Angie said. 'He lives in the right area,' she added, noting his Kingsford address. She scrolled further down. 'Contact here is his uncle. At Liverpool.'

'There's the Liverpool connection,' said Gemma.

'He could have met Adrian Adams at some Botany blood house,' said Angie. 'Or they might have done time together.' She looked at the screen again. 'Let's see what he's done.' The two women looked in silence at Larry Hagen's record. Grievous bodily harm, sexual assault. Gaol terms for violent attacks on women. 'In 1983 he abducted an ex-girlfriend from her flat and assaulted her.'

Angie looked up from reading. She studied the police photograph on the screen, looking closely. 'Hey,' she said, '*he's* the one who spoke to me at the funeral! Said he recognised me from the newspaper.' She swung around on her chair. 'That shot was deliberately out of focus. He couldn't have recognised me from the photo.' She looked up at Gemma. 'How the hell did bloody Bruno miss this? Where is the bastard? I'll kill him for this.' She noted the address, grabbed her coat and hurried out of the office. Gemma followed. 'We had him,' she was saying as she ran to her car in the underground parking area. 'We could have picked him up at the funeral.'

In the car, she radioed the two police officers who were sitting off Roger Poole's place. 'Meet me at the corner of Victoria and Botany streets, Kingsford,' she told them. 'I've got a suspect I want to talk to. I may need some extra help. Tell Colin to meet us there.' She dropped Gemma off beside her car in Riley Street, and Gemma settled down behind her, following.

Colin and Jason were already parked some distance from the corner and Angie grabbed the street directory and jumped out of her car to talk to them. She was only gone a few minutes.

'They're going to go round the back. There's a lane behind Hagen's place. We don't want him hopping over the back fence.'

In another few minutes, Angie pulled up discreetly down the street from 113, a small nineteenth-century worker's terrace, one of many in the street. The two women walked towards the house.

Gemma could feel a tightness around her throat and chest. Remember to breathe, Kit used to tell her. She inhaled deeply and let Angie open the iron gate. The narrow front yard had been cemented, and half a cement seahorse stood forlornly with morning glory vines trailing from it.

Angie knocked. Then knocked again. It was clear there was no one home. No lights, no sounds from inside. No white Toyota parked on the street.

'What do we do now?' Gemma asked.

'We leave someone here watching. We put his description out everywhere. We get everyone alerted. I'll get a warrant for this place. I'll search it from top to bottom.'

Gemma stood at the front door, trying to get a feel for the place, for the man who lived there but wasn't in. But she felt nothing. The blinds were down in the tightly shut windows. There was nothing on the tiny tiled verandah, no pot plant, nothing to reveal anything of the character of the man who lived there. She shivered. This was the one they'd been hunting all this time. We mightn't've known his name, she thought, but we knew more about his character than we wanted to.

'You better go home,' Angie was saying.

Gemma didn't move.

'I promise I'll let you know the minute anything happens,' Angie said.

Gemma drove home. As she turned the corner prior to drawing up beside the kerb she thought she saw Taxi sitting by the top gate, but the surge of relief was quickly followed by disappointment when she realised it was only a large paper

bag of rubbish. She felt restless. So near and yet so far, she was thinking. It had to be Larry Hagen. He had the form, the violent background, the criminal know-how. And there was no other explanation for that phone number being on the notepad. She wondered about the shopping list disclosed by the ESTA machine. Tape? Ropes? A knife? Cornflakes? Kit had often reminded her that murderers, even the most violent, did the ordinary things as well. She rang her sister but all she got was the answering machine. She tried sitting down with her calculator and a pen to work out her finances for the next six months, but it was too dispiriting when she looked at the figures and her body was jumping to do something physical. She checked that the kestrel had enough water and thought that he might have eaten a little of the mince she'd put in for him.

She found herself on the street, doing a doorknock, asking if the householders had seen Taxi. But it wasn't a good time to be doing this, she knew, with people settled in front of television, winding down for the night, irritated by strangers at the door or fearful of her knock, as some faces showed. She had interviewed most of the people on both sides of her street before she gave up. No one had seen Taxi. Too disheartened to continue doorknocking, she returned home, got her powerful torch, and started hunting around in the bushes that grew at the front of the timber deck, scared of what she might find. But there was nothing there. Not even the odd wrapped lunch. The Ratbag must have found another dump site, she thought. Then she extended her search to the edge of the level ground ahead of the timber deck. This was low scrubby brush, constantly worried by the southerly. Beyond it was the steep incline that led down to the rocks and, eventually, the southern end of the beach. She shone the torch down the incline. All she could see were rocks

and straggly vegetation. Taxi sometimes went down there to hunt the pigeons who lived around the cliffs further south. The sea was calm tonight, just a low, hushed sound and the moon was nearly gone.

She sat to rest against a rock and switched off the torch. Her night vision showed her the dim outline of the beach a little way to the left and the darkness of the cliff face that ran along the coast to Bondi. She thought of Larry Hagen, remembered his passive, heavy face from the mug shot; his distorted need for relationship that drove him to attend the funeral of the girl he'd murdered, compelled him to contact her young sister and abduct her. She wondered where he'd strike next. Even though he moved towards women he believed he *knew* in some way, it was unlikely he'd make another attempt on Amy Perrault. She wondered how he'd first decided on Bianca. Perhaps Adrian Adams had 'introduced' them; perving on her first, photographing her, then bringing his new partner along on a house raid.

She stood up and went back to the house. She was spooked, imagining the killer sitting off her place, watching her movements. She slammed the sliding doors shut and locked them. Kit should be home by now, she thought, because it was quite late, so she tried her again. Still no one home.

She looked up at the photo of Kit hanging above the television. Something in that moment, the knife in her hand, Kit's face smiling down at her, her conjecturings about Larry Hagen, brought her to realisation. Adrian Adams had boxes and boxes of photographs of Kit. This killer had teamed up with Adrian Adams. She jumped up and screamed out loud.

'No! Kit!'

Gemma ran into the bedroom, opened the bedside drawer and snatched up her .38 and a handful of cartridges. She

grabbed her mobile, leaped into the car and was on the way to Kit's place when she hit Angie's number.

'Angie! Kit's not answering her phone. She's always there at night. Larry Hagen might have seen her photographs.'

'Jesus!' said Angie, her sleepy voice suddenly sharp. 'I'm on my way!'

Gemma pulled up outside Kit's place. A little way down the street was a white Toyota ute. Please don't let it be his. Please let Kit be all right, Gemma prayed. Almost unable to look, she took in the registration. Her relief was enormous but short-lived. Kit's house was in darkness although her car was there. She fumbled, loading the weapon on the run. Please, she prayed, let it be all right. Let Kit just be having an early night. She made her way silently down the left-hand side passage, but found that Kit had padlocked the gate that blocked it halfway down. She ran to the other side and found the same problem. She was sweating with fear for her sister and herself. She raced back to the road and around the corner, taking the road that led to the coastal path, running the few metres until she came to Kit's back fence and gate. She tried it, but it was padlocked, too.

She pushed the gun into a pocket and clambered up and over the ivy-covered gate, praying that she wouldn't shoot her own leg, dropping down on the other side. She froze. The grille door to the kitchen stood wide open and the hose lay looped on the ground, still running. Hurry up, Angie, she prayed. Come along with a dozen great big SPG brutes right now. She put her hand on the gun, grateful for its heaviness in her pocket, and continued to creep towards the door. Now she could hear Kit talking, in a low voice, but she was unable to make out the words. Gemma stood, uncertain. Maybe Kit was having an early night, and she had

over-reacted wildly. Maybe the white Toyota belonged to a nice banker a few doors down.

Cautiously, she moved into the kitchen, her eyes adjusting to the lack of light. It was empty.

She stood still, straining to absorb every sound. She thought she could hear Kit's voice. Then she was sure. 'You will be compelled to do this sort of thing over and over,' Kit was saying, her voice shaking. Kit was frightened. Gemma knew that tone. And then she heard it. A man's rasping *whisper*. It was *him*. Her blood seized up in terror. He was here with her sister. Gemma crept through the kitchen and started down the hallway, the gun drawn, cocked and ready to fire. The awful whispered rasp had stopped and Kit was talking again.

'It will never end,' she was saying. 'Unless you do something about it. You'll live in this torment for the rest of your life.'

They were in Kit's therapy room. Gemma could see a flickering light and again the man's harsh whisper. She moved closer to the room, wishing she'd attended the pistol club practice sessions more often. She got right up to the door and looked around.

Kit lay on her side, facing the door, her hands bound behind her. Larry Hagen towered over her, the knife in his hand flickering in the candle light, his huge shadow looming and throbbing. Gemma raised her firing arm and took careful aim.

The next few seconds seemed to take forever, because there was time for Kit to see her sister at the doorway, time for this to register on her terrified face, time for Larry Hagen to swing around and lunge so that the first shot missed him. Then he was on top of her, dragging her into the room, pushing her up against the mantelpiece, one arm bashing her

firing arm into the air, the other bringing the knife down towards her face. Gemma screamed and attempted to block the knife arm's descent, at the same time kicking out as hard as she could towards Hagen's groin. Her weapon went flying from her grasp. He roared and faltered, jerking his striking arm up, knife still held tight.

Her right arm was now painfully pinned against the wall behind the shelf, while her left scrabbled to find something – anything – on the mantelpiece that might serve as a weapon. The vase of flowers and the candle crashed to the floor. Kit was yelling behind them, helpless in her bonds. Gemma looked into the darkness of his eye pits as the knife came down again. Her left hand closed around something small and hard. Grasping it in her fist, she tried to block his deadly downward arc. But she was no match for his strength and this time, although she'd deflected the blow away from her face, he struck her hard on the arm. With the adrenalin strength of desperation, she smashed her fist into his face again with everything she had. This time, he reeled back and the knife clattered to the floor. With horror, Gemma realised that blood was pouring from her right arm. Larry Hagen's knife blow had laid it open.

'On the floor!' Kit was screaming. 'Over near the door!'

Dazed, Gemma looked around. Larry Hagen was flailing against the opposite wall, gurgling and struggling, trying to regain his feet.

'Your gun!' Kit was screaming. 'On the floor near the door!'

Gemma groped around for her gun, aware of Larry Hagen recovering himself, scrabbling to his feet again.

'Hurry!' Kit screamed. 'Get me out of here!'

As their attacker lunged to grab her again, Gemma heard a sound like thunder. Angie and three uniforms, torches and

guns drawn, pounded down the hall. Three men burst into the room and tackled Larry Hagen. He crashed to the floor with two men on top of him.

Angie switched on the light to reveal the struggling men, Kit yelling on the cushions and Gemma transfixed against the mantelpiece. 'Jesus H. Christ,' Angie said. 'You two sisters.' She looked to where Larry Hagen was being dragged to his feet, handcuffed. 'What did you do to him?'

Gemma looked at her assailant for the first time. Limp hair fell across his face and his bloodied head hung forward. His feet stalled then dragged as he was hauled off the floor and out of the room. Near the door, Gemma's gun and his knife lay side by side. Quickly, Angie stooped to cut Kit free while in the hallway, Gemma could hear someone calling for an ambulance.

'And what have you done to yourself?' Angie asked as one of the uniformed officers wrapped a towel around Gemma's bleeding arm.

'Thank God you came,' Kit said to her sister. 'I thought this was it. I thought I'd never see you or anyone again.' She put her arms round her younger sister and held her. Gemma felt the huge sobs break out from her body.

'Thank God Angie got here when she did,' she said.

'It's all right, Gemmyfish. It's all right now.'

It was over, Gemma knew. Really over.

THIRTY-TWO

Gemma's wound, expertly stitched, neatly wrapped and splinted, throbbed only slightly. The small room off Casualty seemed crowded with the three of them and the surgeon. 'I'm not going to bed,' she told the surgeon. 'I'm not sick.'

'I'd just like you to wait here for an hour or so,' the surgeon said. 'Just so it settles down before you leave. It's a deep cut. And a ligament is damaged.'

'You'll need to rest,' said Kit. 'The effects of the anaesthetic will last for a while.'

'I'm all right,' said Gemma. 'I just want to get out of here and go home.' She turned to her sister. 'And you should talk. After what you went through.'

'I never thought I'd be using my therapy room for that purpose,' said Kit. 'All I could do was play for time. But he was running out of patience.' She had told Angie and Gemma of how she'd been watering the garden in the cool night, the kitchen door open behind her, when the man with the knife had jumped down from the wall. 'I just did as he told me,' she said. 'He taped my hands. And then we talked for ages. I don't know how long it was. It seemed forever. He told me a lot about himself. I used every ounce of skill and instinct to disarm him.'

'It's the reason you're still alive,' said Angie.

'The reason I'm still alive is my sister.' Kit stroked Gemma's face, pushing back a strand of hair. Gemma had told her of the nightmare moment in which she'd realised Larry Hagen's next move. 'But the more we talked,' she continued, 'the more he opened up to me, the more he realised I would know about him; the more dangerous to him I became. I could see his energy change as he decided he'd had enough talk. That was when I saw you at the door, Gems.'

'I'm putting Bruno on paper,' said Angie, 'the minute I get back to the office. He checked the wrong record. He looked under Hogan, not Hagen, and found a cleanskin. Now the boss can deal with the bugger. I'm never working with him again. If there's any justice, he'll wind up doing general duties at Blayney. Which reminds me, the white Toyota. That car turned up in Lithgow. The buyer had sold it on, but he kept the wheel barrow. He was a builder. It seems he was watching that motel; his wife was in there. So Spinner was right.'

'Is there a Gemma Lincoln somewhere here?' Gemma heard Spinner's voice outside, asking the sister in charge.

'Hey, Spinner,' she said, ducking her head out the door. 'In here.'

He was carrying a bunch of poppies, brilliant reds, oranges and pinks. 'These are for you,' he said sheepishly. 'I heard you saved the day. What happened?'

Gemma told him.

'How's the injury?'

She shrugged, holding up her bandaged arm, and Spinner frowned with concern. Gemma put her good arm around him. 'Spinner,' she said. 'You're the best.'

He laughed, pushing the compliment away. 'I've got a date,' he said. 'With Rose Georgiou.'

Gemma laughed. 'Good for you,' she said. But Spinner had already said more than he'd meant to. He became aware of the others and stopped talking.

'So this is the famous Spinner,' said Angie as Gemma introduced them. Her phone rang and she went into a corner, talking on her mobile. She rang off and turned round. 'You'll never believe it,' she said. 'That was Ted Ackland.'

Gemma remembered Dr Ackland well, the tall, stooped forensic pathologist. 'Larry Hagen is dead. Brain haemorrhage. What did you hit him with?'

Gemma shook her head. 'I don't know. Some stone or something that was on the mantelpiece. I didn't intend to kill him.' She shuddered and looked at Kit.

'My Cyprus marble,' Kit said. 'I picked it up on a beach.' It had lain there, rattling in the light seas, Gemma thought, for eons, then it had come to Australia to sit on a mantelpiece until its time came. A wave of weakness overcame her.

'Small, white and lethal,' Gemma quoted. 'Just like she said.'

'Just like who said?' Angie wanted to know.

But Gemma deflected the question. 'Kit, I want to go home.'

'Before you go,' said Spinner, 'will you ring Noel? Says he wants to talk to you.' Gemma nodded.

'Take her home, Kit,' said Angie. 'She's just saved the state millions of dollars.'

'I didn't mean to kill anyone,' Gemma said again.

Kit put an arm around her. 'I know you didn't,' she said. 'Come on, darling. I'll take you home.'

'Let me take her home,' said a deep male voice and there was Richard Cross striding in, a huge bunch of red flowers tied with brown and silver ribbon. Gemma smiled with pleasure as he came over to her. She thought he had

never looked so handsome in a tweed jacket and navy slacks, still somewhat formal with a shirt and tie. Gemma was aware of Angie's admiring glance. She introduced them and they shook hands.

'How did you know where to find me?' Gemma asked.

'I have my spies,' he said, laughing.

'Promise me you'll be careful,' the surgeon said. 'You've been through a lot and the anaesthetic can make you a bit woozy for a while.'

'I'll take great care of her,' said Richard.

'I'm starving!' said Gemma.

'I can certainly do something about that,' said Richard.

'Okay, okay,' she said, laughing between the men. 'Who's going to take Kit home? She needs more looking after than me after what she's been through.'

'I will,' said Angie, taking Kit's arm. 'I'll even tuck you in.'

'Take me to Gemma's place, if that's OK with you, Gems?' Gemma nodded. 'Somehow,' Kit added, 'I don't feel like going back to my place just yet.'

Richard Cross took Gemma's elbow, steering her along the footpath to his black Mercedes. He opened the door for her and she climbed in, again enjoying the old-fashioned smell of an expensive car. He came round and got in, putting the flowers in the back seat. 'I've got you under false pretences,' he said. 'There's something I want to show you before I drive you home. It's only a little way out of our way. Do you mind?'

Gemma shook her head. 'As long as you feed me soon,' she laughed. She was feeling a little crazy and wondered how much of it was due to the local anaesthetic, how much to the adrenalin in her system, and how much to

the fact that somehow, she had struck the blow that killed Larry Hagen.

Angie stopped at a little shop so that Kit could buy provisions; she knew what Gemma's refrigerator could be like. 'I don't like leaving you alone,' said Angie, as they sat on the timber deck. A storm was coming up from the south and half the sky was black with the rest still starry. The sea was growling around the rocks and Kit shivered to think how close death had come to her that night. 'Is there someone who can come and be with you until Gemma gets home?'

'Truly, I'll be fine,' said Kit. 'I have a son,' she added. 'If I'm feeling really shaky, I can ask him.' I have a son again, she thought, and the idea strengthened her. They went inside, driven by the rising wind, and closed and locked the sliding door against a now stormy sky.

'Come down tomorrow,' said Angie, 'and we'll take your statement then. Tonight you need to recuperate.' Then she stood and looked at Kit, head on one side. 'You know,' she said, 'you two sisters are really something. I was so pissed off with both of you – especially *you* – and now, well ... lost in admiration would be the expression I'd use.' Angie opened her arms and they hugged each other.

'We've been through a lot, the pair of us. But I want to thank you for getting there too.'

Sometime later, Kit was making up the lounge bed, wondering how much longer her sister would be when the phone rang.

'Gemma?'

'No,' Kit answered. 'I'm her sister. I can take a message.'

'Kit. It's Steve. Steve Brannigan.'

'Steve,' she said, unsure of how much she should tell him.

'Gemma's not here right now. Could I get her to ring you tomorrow?'

There was a long pause. 'Actually, I need to talk to you. And now. I'm not able to move around freely just yet. Tomorrow I won't be available. It's about the statement your father wrote the night your mother was killed.'

'Yes,' she said. 'Gemma told me she'd given it to you to give to some language expert.' And it all rose up in her again, the huge business with her father. The death of her mother, all of it eclipsed by the drama of the last few hours in which she'd thought that she, too, would die.

'Actually,' Steve was saying, 'it's really good that you're there.' He paused. 'You may know already that Gemma and I have gone our separate ways and I didn't know how to do this.'

'Do what?' Kit asked, alert to the urgency in his voice.

'I can't really explain over the phone,' he said. 'I know this sounds peculiar, but could I come over? Now?'

'OK,' she agreed. 'But I don't know how rational I'll be. I've had a helluva night.' She started laughing as she rang off. The laughter became more intense and she just let it rip until it turned into deep sobbing.

She was still blowing her nose when Steve arrived. 'I'm sorry about the hour,' he said, looking anxiously at Kit's tear-stained face. 'But this is extremely important.'

They sat at the dining table opposite each other, and Steve pulled out a manila folder. 'Locky's written a full report,' he said, handing it to her. It contained a dozen or more typed sheets of paper. She briefly looked through it and handed it back, noticing that the copy of the statement was covered with highlighters of different colours and all the pronouns were circled.

'I'll do my best to give you a concentrated SCAN lesson,'

said Steve. 'This sort of analysis is based on the fact that the language a person uses in his statement reflects reality.'

'Yes,' she said. 'I'm familiar with the way mind and behaviour are connected. It's my life's work.'

'Gemma told me that the subject – your father – sat down and wrote this after the death of his wife. So the statement hasn't been contaminated by questions or any weird policese, like "male person".' Kit nodded. Steve went on. 'Humans are extremely possessive creatures. But your father doesn't use the possessive pronoun "my wife" when he introduces her in the text. The next important thing to notice is where your father decided to *start* his statement about the event. Not as one might have expected with his arriving home to find the terrible scene. No. He starts his statement with this sentence.' Steve started reading:

'*At about two-thirty, I rang Marianne to see if she wanted to go to the dinner that night at the university. She told me she didn't want to go to the dinner, because she is being treated for depression. I said that was fine with me. We did not argue.*' He looked up again from the statement. 'Expert analysis says that *that* phone call – in your father's mind at least – is the start of the main event. Now you'd have to ask yourself why is that?' Kit leaned forward, listening with all her attention. 'Because during that phone call, his wife told him something that was the beginning of her death.' Steve put the statement down. 'This is hard for me,' he said. 'Having to tell you this.'

'Keep going,' said Kit. She found that she was clenching her fingers so hard, her nails were cutting into the palms of her hands.

'The fact that he wrote "we did not argue",' Steve continued, 'is extremely important. When someone writes what they *didn't* do in a statement, or what *didn't* happen, a SCAN analyst becomes extremely curious, because a

statement is about what *did* happen.' Kit looked down again at her father's statement, following the written words upside down as Steve read them aloud. '*I saw four more of my patients.*' Steve stopped. 'Notice he says "my patients" and yet a little further on he's talking about "a" patient. The analyst wants to know why it is that he wants to distance himself from that particular patient.' Kit slowly nodded. It made sense to her. Steve read on. '*. . . went to the bank but because there was a long queue, did not get money out then. Made a brief house call to a patient.*' Steve jabbed at the paper. 'This is what we call the missing "I",' he said. 'Three times he's not there. In his own statement! It can mean that the person was not actually present in the action. So he's "missing" at the bank, "missing" when he *doesn't* get money out . . .' Again, he paused. 'Remember the importance of mentioning something that *didn't* happen. And in this case, he further unwittingly draws attention to this transaction by using the word "then". This tells us that he *did* get money *at another time*. This withdrawal is very important in his mind. And an analyst wants to know why. Because almost straight after that he is making a house call to "a" patient, not "my" patient as in the earlier example, and the "I" is also missing. These are significant signals of concealment and deception.' Kit felt her heart sink.

'*After that, I left.*' Steve put the paper down. '"After" is what we term a "missing connection". After what, we have to ask? What happened at this meeting with this patient that he wants to distance himself from in the statement? Did he give the patient money, this patient that he distances himself from? The use of the word "left" in a statement always implies some sense of stress or urgency.' He saw Kit's face and his serious expression softened. 'I'm sorry,' he said, 'to be telling you this. I wish it was otherwise. Then look what your father does: *drove straight to the house* – "the" house. Not

"my house" or "home". This indicates no sense of ownership of the house. Was it rented?'

Kit shook her head. 'No,' she said. 'It belonged to Grandfather Lincoln.' Steve nodded at the confirmation.

'*Marianne was in bed and the girls were in their room,*' Steve read. 'The way he refers to his daughters doesn't indicate relationship. His own daughters are just "the girls".' Kit felt her own eyes filling. Some old sense of shame was activated. We weren't important to you at all, were we, she said to herself. 'Nor does he bother introducing you. It is not very good. And you have no names.' Kit turned her attention back to the statement, not wanting Steve to see the incipient tears. But he was reading on.

> *I went upstairs to get ready for the dinner. There was no food for the girls so I drove to the corner shop and got some eggs and made scrambled eggs for them. Then I got dressed to go out to the dinner and left the house at about seven-thirty. Marianne was up. I stayed at the dinner until about ten-thirty and drove to the house, arriving there at eleven o'clock. I parked my car and went inside. I went into the dining room and found Marianne lying in the corner near the french doors, which were open. She had severe head injuries and had lost a lot of blood. There was a faint, stringy pulse. I rang Emergency and waited for the ambulance to arrive. They said they would contact the police. I cradled Marianne in my arms and she coughed blood onto me. She was not conscious. Gemma came in and I told her your mother is hurt and to go next door and tell Mrs Moresby to come over. I went with Marianne in the ambulance and stayed until the surgeon came out and said my wife had died. I came home and Mrs Moresby is here staying the night with us. The police have just been and taken my clothes. I don't know anyone who would want to kill my wife and that is what I told them.*

Steve put the statement down flat on the table. 'Notice that

Marianne only becomes his wife when she's dead. And also notice how in the last few sentences he has moved away from the past tense – the tense of commitment.'

Kit said nothing. She had heard enough to work it out. She stood up and walked to the large sliding glass doors. It wasn't possible to see anything outside. Rain slanted against the glass and she remembered a terrible storm after their mother's death and trying to comfort Gemma with a game of watching raindrops race each other down a casement window. Steve picked up a letter that was with the report. 'I'll read you what Locky wrote to Gemma.'

> Taken as a whole, there are so many signals of deception that the statement is very doubtful. There are no *emotions* in this statement. In a statement that reflects the truth, we expect that emotions will show up because language reflects reality. I am sorry to have to tell you that your father's statement reveals considerable involvement in the death of your mother. If I had been in a position to interview this man, I would have taken certain directions in my questioning.

'It must be hard for you to hear this,' said Steve.

'I always thought he did it,' she said. 'I remember the terrible fights.'

'Do you want me to read the rest of Locky's letter?' Kit nodded. Steve read:

> It is certainly not my job to interpret anything other than the language of this statement. But here I'm going to conjecture. I wonder if the subject somehow induced that patient to kill his wife, perhaps by money, perhaps in some other, subtler way while he was away at the

university dinner. Then he could say quite truthfully that he came home and found her dying. And I'm convinced that the decision to have her killed happened during that phone call to his wife. Because that's the point, in his mind at least, that the events of the night started. Which is why he unconsciously started his account of her death at that spot.

'Well,' said Steve. 'There it is. I don't envy you the job of telling Gemma. It was very important to her that her father was innocent.'

'It was,' said Kit. 'She will be terribly hurt. It's something she's held on to all her life. And it looked like she was right. Especially after the bloodstain expert had studied the crime scene pictures and said that they supported our father's account.' She felt a deep sadness. Now I have to deal with this huge fact about my father. Again. About my family. The bloodstain evidence was true as far as it went. Her father *had* come home to find his wife dying. But her father had also caused her to *be* dying in the first place. 'It's not really a shock to me,' she said. 'I'm surprised at the depth of the sadness I feel just now.'

'It must have been a most terrible situation for you and your sister, the events of that night.' Kit nodded. 'And the repercussions would have gone on for many years,' Steve said.

'Are still going on,' said Kit. 'Angry ghosts are still around us.' She looked up at Steve, who was standing against the sliding doors with rain lashing the glass behind him. 'Gemma's been involved in an investigation that very nearly ended up with me dead earlier tonight.' And she told him what had happened to her and about Larry Hagen's eventual death.

'Good on her,' Steve said, and Kit could read his confusion, his love and his anger with her sister.

After he'd gone, Kit sat thinking. I want to confront my father with this, she thought. I want to hear him confirm it. He's served his time, but he must come clean with his daughters. For Gemma's sake. For my sake. Somehow, she knew she could let it go if he owned up. She thought of Will and what he'd said. 'You were honest about your part in it,' he'd said. 'And that forced me to look at mine.' Their father must see the continuing damage he would cause if he refused to admit the truth. She would contact him tomorrow. But at that moment, she stretched out on the lounge bed, too exhausted by the day's events to do anything but sleep.

THIRTY-THREE

Gemma stood in Richard's apartment watching a huge container vessel eclipse the rainstreaked lights of the harbour. The rain had eased off in the last half hour and she was suddenly exhausted. The wound on her arm throbbed, working its way past the analgesics. I really need to be home, she thought. Get back to Kit, see how she's coping with coming up against Larry Hagen. Stupid Bruno and his Hogan/Hagen blunder had almost caused Kit's death. It's been a big day for a little surveillance operator. Behind her, the red flowers stood dramatically on a low table near the huge oil painting on the western wall of Richard's unit. They were the perfect choice for his sombre room; a flash of fire in the darkness, Gemma thought, sipping her drink.

A dramatic black and gold candle shed soft light on the meal they'd just eaten together. He'd had a delicious Thai meal delivered and Gemma had eaten hungrily, glad her back was turned to the Melanesian deity of the enormous donger. Richard had changed into a soft linen shirt and dark slacks and wore Japanese-style slippers made of woven straw and cotton. He looked completely relaxed. She'd accepted his invitation to take her shoes off at the door, and now enjoyed the feel of luxurious carpet pile against her bare feet as she sat on the floor, her

back and shoulders comfortable against the leather lounge behind her.

'It was very difficult,' Richard was saying from where he sat to her left, 'being the eldest son of migrants. I had to translate everything for them for years. In some ways, I was the man of the house. It made my father very angry. My mother was . . .' He paused. 'Things were very difficult at one stage,' he resumed. 'Things happened . . .' His voice trailed away again as if he were lost in some memory of past misery. 'What about your father?' he said. 'Have you definitely decided what you're going to do about him?'

She considered. 'I have to try to clear his name,' she said. 'Even though he doesn't want me to.'

'But surely,' he said, 'if it concerns him, he has some rights in the matter.'

'If I'm honest,' she said, 'I have to admit it concerns him more than it concerns me.' She blinked and her head felt light, her wound painful. 'And now I have new evidence that proves his innocence,' she said. The haziness in her head threatened to fog her up completely. 'I'll have to go home,' she said, turning to him. She saw him clearly in his own setting and wondered whether she really wanted to see him again. He represented age and security to her and they were father things, she knew. I need a partner who is right for me, she thought. Someone like Steve.

'Of course,' he was saying. 'I'll take you now.' She waited while he disappeared into another room, presumably to get his jacket. Gemma's eyes wandered to the red flowers that were so perfect in this room. They matched everything exquisitely. There was no doubt that Richard Cross had an artist's eye. He had a red Japanese bridge over a water lily lake out at his factory just like Monet had in his garden. The flowers in his apartment matched exactly the red in the dark

and dominating oil painting. 'What's a decor?' the Ratbag had asked her. The blue and white and gold flowers had been perfect, too. He couldn't help himself from getting it right. *Except that when he'd sent those anonymous flowers, he hadn't been to her place, couldn't have known what her living room looked like.*

Gemma's body suddenly stiffened in automatic defence. How had he known what the inside of her place looked like? Only a few people in the world knew that. He'd chosen her little outfit to secure his warehouses, factory and office, instead of one of the big operations who were local to him at Campbelltown. She'd been flattered. Despite her exhaustion, alarm bells were ringing. He wasn't interested in her at all. He was a would-be politician and she'd fallen for his charm. He's going to put something on me, she thought. He's groomed me and cultivated me and now he's going to use me. Maybe something illegal in the surveillance line. Getting dirt on a political rival. Gemma, you're a goose, a vain and foolish goose.

Richard Cross was opening the doors to the balcony, splashing barefoot through the puddles to where his umbrella had blown into the corner. Gemma frowned. Something was wrong. The powerful sensor light should have come on and it hadn't. Not only had she fallen for the work he'd put in on her, the lights she and Noel had installed weren't even working properly. She saw Richard through the rainstreaked glass moving back and forwards, trying to activate it. Damn it, she thought. How embarrassing. Flowers and flattery and I walk straight in. Someone was banging on the front door.

'There's someone at your door,' Gemma called out. Richard was standing in front of the sensor unit under the powerful light, waving his hand to and fro around it, trying to activate it. The banging became louder. Richard came back inside, smiling and shaking his head.

'That light, she no go,' he said playfully, and Gemma remembered the slight trace of accent. He heard the loud banging on the door. 'Who could that be?' he said. She stood there, waiting for him to attend to his visitor while he went to the door and squinted through the spyhole. When he turned back, his face was ashen.

'What is it?' she asked. He seemed to be thinking on his feet; she could see the racing of his mind reflected on his face as it moved through a series of strange expressions, the colour coming and going.

Real fear was tightening her chest, interfering with her breathing. And there was something niggling. Suddenly, he vanished into another room and came out again. Gemma stared at what he was holding in his right hand, pointed directly at her. Her mind was refusing to believe what her eyes were seeing.

She saw Richard Cross's thumb move to push the safety off. The aggressive and distinctive Uzi pistol with its ugly, squashed barrel is a weapon that you never forget. It should be fired two-handed, she remembered, even though it sits firmly in the hand at just a little under two kilos fully loaded.

'What the hell do you think you're doing?' she said.

'Open the door,' he said. 'Just let him in. Don't say a word.' His voice was hard and tight; the charm had dropped right out of it and his face now seemed older and narrower.

'I don't understand—' she started to say.

'You don't have to understand. Do as you're told.'

Gemma felt the terror reach her knees. She couldn't move. '*Do it!*' he snarled. 'Let him in.'

As she groped her way to the door, barely able to see for shock, tumblers moved together in her mind and something unlocked. Hogan/Hagen. Wrong names. Changed names.

Translated names. 'Hahndorf sounds so elegant, but it means chook city,' her father had said. Cross Weld. Kreutzvalt. She fumbled at the door, then opened it. Her jaw dropped when she saw who it was.

'*Dad? What*—' Then she screamed. '*He's got a gun!*'

But it was too late, her father had pushed past her and into the room. 'Put that down, Kreutzvalt,' he commanded. 'Put it down at once.'

'Come out here, doctor,' the armed man gestured. 'Out onto the balcony. Do it, or I'll kill your daughter.'

'All right, all right,' Gemma heard her father say from a long way away. Shock and sedation were making her mind waver, so that she seemed to be coming and going in waves. She steeled herself into consciousness. 'Don't harm her,' her father was saying. 'This is between you and me, Arik.'

'It was,' said the man with the Uzi. 'Then she comes along and wants to reopen the case. I've spent thirty years putting the past behind me. I'm not going to let one mistake destroy the rest of my life. If the new evidence cleared him,' Richard Cross swung around to Gemma, 'you'd've come after me. You leave me no choice.'

'It was you!' said Gemma. 'Mrs Moresby heard you breaking in half an hour before my father returned home.'

'I was only your father's agent. I was a patient of his. Unstable, psychotic – they were the labels in those days. I carried out the doctor's instructions.'

Everything goes in twos, Mrs Moresby had said. Two sisters thirty years ago. Two Perrault girls. Two killers at Liverpool. Two killers thirty years ago. And here they both were. Gemma put her hands over her ears, shaking her head. 'Tell me it's not true, Dad,' Gemma said, her mouth dry with terror. She was afraid she'd wet her pants. 'Please, Dad.'

But her father said nothing, his face turned away, in some

other place of his own just as she'd seen him in her car on the drive home from Silverwater.

'Outside,' said Richard Cross. 'Both of you onto the balcony.'

He ushered them through the doorway. The light drizzle had stopped but the night sky was black and sheet lightning flickered on the horizon over the Heads. A strong wind had come from nowhere and swirled around them, its vortices on the balcony causing dead leaves to stir and whisper. Gemma stood close by her father. My father murdered my mother. And because I clung to the past and I believed him to be innocent, I reactivated all this dormant evil. Some huge energy uncurled itself in her. Mindlessly, she threw herself on her father, hitting him in the face with all her strength. '*You did it!*' she screamed. 'You did it and I believed you!' He skidded on the slippery surface of the wet balcony, but regained his balance. 'I believed you! *You were my father!*' She kept hitting him; she couldn't hurt him enough. He didn't try to stop her, just cowered under her blows, arms up to defend himself from her attack, huddled against the wall.

'Stop it!' The hard voice of the man with the Uzi wasn't the only factor to make her drop her arms. Gemma suddenly slumped in despair. I think my heart will break, she thought to herself, if I don't die of fear first. He did it just as surely as if he'd wielded the hammer himself. I am the child of a murderer.

She stood still, panting, her breath coming in sobs, aware of the racing of her blood. The wind howled around the tower building and she wanted to howl, too.

'Go to the light,' Cross commanded her. 'Adjust the sensor unit. I paid a lot of money to you and you've done a bad job. Make it work.' She could hear the contempt in his voice.

Gemma blinked, bewildered. Her brain had stopped

working. While some primitive part warned of terrible danger, her conscious mind struggled to make sense of the situation. Her father was still slumped against the wall and Gemma took a step away from him and towards the lamp, picked out by the lights from Richard Cross's apartment. The anaesthetic, the events of the day, her exhaustion, her emotional upheaval all combined to create the blankness in her mind. She kept moving as if in a dream. Go to the light, he'd said. That's what the dying are instructed to do, she recalled from somewhere. To go towards the light. She kept walking and raised her right hand ready to adjust the sensor unit. In this unreal and heightened state, time slowed to a standstill. She was aware of the coldness of the wet ground beneath her feet.

Just before she touched the small white sensor, she heard her father's cry behind her, '*No, Gemma!*' Felt something hurtle towards her, then a shocking impact that crashed her painfully to the ground. Instinctively, she'd put out her arm to break the fall and a searing streak of agony shot up into her shoulder as the gash on her arm reopened. She sprawled hard, her head cracking against the eastern wall, crashing into her father, who fell almost on top of her.

The appalling sound of gunshots at close quarters blew her eardrums into deafness. She felt a pressing blackness in her head. She twisted her neck to the side, stunned, to see her father's wide open mouth close by her and his soundless scream. In perfect silence, he was rolling away from her, his body protecting her from the 9 mm Parabellum cartridges that should have ripped through her chest.

Richard Cross had grabbed the balcony with one hand to steady himself, firing with his right, and the buck of the Uzi kicked his firing hand against the sensor unit of the light. From her position on the ground, Gemma could now see

that there was no globe under the cowling of the lamp. It could never have gone on. As his firing arm touched the sensor, she saw his face also contort and his mouth open wide. An incredible tremor surged as some huge power of the air seized him, then his face contorted in a silent scream and hurled him over the balcony rail. Through the deep silence came the whiff of burning.

Gemma scrambled to the railing and knelt there, too weak to stand. She could see through the railings. Fifteen stories down, she could just discern his still form, making a broken little swastika shape on the ground near the greenery. She turned back to her father, whose lips were moving. I can't hear you, she tried to say. I can't hear you. His eyes were pleading with her. She knelt beside him, taking his hand in hers because there was nothing else she could do for him now. The tears finally streamed down her face. 'Oh Daddy, oh Daddy,' her mouth was saying, but she could only hear the words in her mind. Go towards the light, she told him.

Wet bare feet, electricity, the sensor that Richard Cross must have rewired, disconnecting the earth, running the live wire to the sensor unit so that her touch on the small, white, lethal sensor would complete the circuit and she would die, a victim as it would seem to her own company's incompetence. But it didn't happen like that, because at the very last you did what a father should do. You pushed me out of the way and died in the effort. In the light that fell on him from the windows of the unit, she could see that his lips were no longer moving and that his eyes had frozen. Gemma had seen that stillness in too many other eyes to mistake it. Go towards the light, she told him in the huge ringing silence that surrounded them both, shrouding them together as if they were the only two people in the world. She knelt back

on her heels, heedless of the slanting drizzle that had started up again. She wondered if her hearing was returning and if she could hear sirens or if it was simply the deep and inner wailing of her grievous sorrow. She remembered it was her birthday.

THIRTY-FOUR

It was nearly three in the morning by the time Kit tucked her in. 'I'd sit with you for a while,' she said to Gemma. 'Except I'm whacked.' She kissed her sister on the head and then climbed into the made-up lounge bed, leaving the bedroom door open so they could talk. Outside the storm had eased. The wound in Gemma's left arm had been restitched; the police questioning had been mercifully brief, thanks to Angie's intervention. In his carton, the kestrel scraped and flapped.

'What's that noise?' Kit asked in the dark.

'It's the kestrel. I think he's ready to fly,' said Gemma. 'You know that Dad saved my life,' she said. 'He worked out what would happen when I touched the sensor. He knocked me out of the way. He died for me.'

'Yes,' said Kit. 'It goes a long way towards—' She wasn't sure how to finish it.

'Towards making him my father again, our father again – in spite of everything,' Gemma said. It was a long time since they'd shared a bedroom and talked in the dark like this, Kit thought.

'What do you want done with the SCAN result?' Kit asked.

'Chuck it,' said her sister from the bedroom. Her voice

was getting drowsy as the painkillers and exhaustion kicked in. 'You can tell me about it. Did he get it right?'

'He got it right. The language showed significant signals of concealment and deception, he told me, indicating serious involvement in the death of our mother.'

'You always knew that, Kit.'

And a little while later, 'God, we're a pair. Talk about karma.'

But Kit had gone to sleep.

THIRTY-FIVE

Gemma and Kit sat on the grass near their mother's grave. Behind the low stone walls the gentle hills, covered in rows of broken angels and marble crosses, fell away to the edge of the coast where waves surged and smoothed themselves over the rocks, in glassy rolls, or broke in foam, running back to join themselves and surge again. Calliopsis scattered gold all over the green, in some places clumped dense as blotches of yellow poster paint, and a jogger thudded past them round the sunken path that edged the cemetery. It was a perfect afternoon. Enormous white cumulus clouds piled above the sea, empty except for one long container ship.

'Marianne Lincoln 1931–1966', the black lettering on the grave header stated. 'Daughter of Malcolm Lincoln, MBE'.

Kit was adding more roses to one of the tins, pushing them in with the long slender hands that Aunt Merle had told them were their mother's. 'Here we are, Mum,' Kit said. 'You've always known the truth. But he did save Gemma's life and that's got to be worth something, don't you think?' Kit rested back on her heels.

Fifty per cent of me is him, Gemma thought. And fifty per cent of Kit. I've even got his eyes. We have to deal with this no matter how difficult it is. The cemetery seemed

suddenly eerily quiet with the great silence of the dead enclosing them.

Their father's funeral, attended only by herself and Kit, Dr Rowena Wylde and Paul Lestrange, had been a brief, businesslike affair and Kit and Gemma decided to leave his ashes to be disposed of by the crematorium. It's all tied up now, she said to her mother. All finished. Beside her, the wild yellow daisies blew in a light sea breeze.

'How's your arm?' Kit asked, looking at the bandage.

'Still a bit stiff, but the wound is healing. You know I reopened it when—' She felt her voice wobble. '—when Dad pushed me away and I fell against the cement.' She considered, looking at the surge of the waves; hearing the subdued thunder as they struck the rocky shelves below. 'It was so clever, so *nasty*. It would've looked as if Noel had got the wiring wrong in the most basic way. Not even a first year apprentice would make that mistake.'

'Surely that in itself would've created doubt in people's minds.'

'Why?' said Gemma. 'People are electrocuted. Accidents happen. And it would have looked like Noel anyway. Not Richard Cross. He wasn't expecting Dad to turn up on the doorstep. That changed everything.'

'What made him show up then?' Kit asked.

'You know that Noel did some moving for him? They got on very well and somehow Noel ended up telling him that Cross – Kreutzvalt – wanted to know what my flat looked like inside. What colours I'd used. Noel heard from Spinner that the man you left the hospital with was Richard Cross. He told Dad. Obviously that worried him enough to come after me.'

'That gunshot in my ear,' continued Gemma. 'I thought I'd never hear again. It took hours for my hearing to come

back.' Now, she heard the buzzing of bees and the whispered song of wrens in the bushes around the overgrown graves. 'It is all so extraordinary,' she said. 'The way it all came together. The way all the old unfinished business came round again. And our father and Arik Kreutzvalt did what they had to do.' She shuddered. 'It was nearly the end of both of us,' she said. 'I thought I was a goner.'

'I did too,' said Kit, 'when Larry Hagen was standing over me with the knife. I've been in some sticky situations in the therapy room but nothing like that. It focused me wonderfully.'

Gemma laughed. 'Dear Kit. You are such a thera*piste*!' She was suddenly quiet. 'I'm sure of one thing, though, Kit. No more men in hotels for this little Sydney sheila.' She shook her head. 'I think I'll give men up for a while.' She shuddered. 'It's going to take me some time to get over the fact that I went to bed with a murderer. And almost *my* murderer as well.'

They heard a shout and looked around to see the small, sturdy figure of the Ratbag running down the hill, his blue shirt untucked, his backpack bouncing up and down as he ran. Gemma stood up and waved to him. 'Hey!' she called. 'Over here.'

He came up, puffing, dragging the backpack off his back, throwing it on the ground. 'Have you got him?' Gemma indicated the carton and he went to it and opened the four flaps of cardboard, peering in. 'What'll I do?' he asked her, holding the struggling bird down with one hand.

'What about taking him to the edge of the path over there and just holding the box up?' she said. 'That way he can just fly out.'

The Ratbag did as she suggested and the kestrel appeared, flapping. It fell back once into the box as if it had lost

its balance, then it launched itself off the top and flew awkwardly towards an elaborate Hellenic temple style of tomb, to perch on the top of the frieze, staring down at them with its brown eye. It fluffed up all its feathers and looked around.

'He's all right!' the Ratbag said. 'He can fly.' He rooted around in his backpack and brought out a squashed little plastic-wrapped sausage of mince meat.

A shout made them turn around again, and there was Will walking down the path towards them. He still looked terribly thin, but his eyes were clear and his gaunt face, old before its time, broke into a huge smile when he joined them.

Gemma stood up, her heart beating with love. My family, she was thinking. There's not that many of us, but here we all are.

Will came up and hugged his mother. Then he turned to Gemma and kissed her, tall and skinny, with long, pale hands like his mother's. Gemma held his face and looked into his eyes. 'Will,' she said. 'It's been too long.' He nodded, hugging her tighter. He couldn't speak, so he blew his nose and looked away.

The Ratbag was hovering, unsure as to what to do, looking from the hawk to the group of people around the grave. Then he turned to Will. 'That's my hawk up there,' he said. 'I saved him and now he can fly again.'

Kit took a stiff white envelope out of her shoulder bag. 'Paul Lestrange dropped this in to me as Will was arriving,' she told Gemma. 'It's an IOU our father made out to him. And a letter. I haven't looked at it yet. Paul also asked us what we want done about his things.'

'Burn them,' said Gemma without hesitation. Kit nodded. 'My feelings exactly. It's the end of the story. For him. For her.' She indicated the grave.

Will lay back in the grass, hands under his head, staring up at the sky. 'I've always been afraid because of the things done by my grandfather, but I couldn't talk to anyone about it when I was growing up. It was such a big, dirty family secret. Heroin wiped the fear out. But then it brought new fear when it wore off.' He rolled over and sat up. 'I just have to accept the fact that I come from a weird family,' he said. 'No wonder I went off the rails. But I'm doing six NA meetings a week, so hopefully I'll be able to help the rest of you at some stage.'

He was suddenly serious again. 'I've got the feeling,' he said, 'that I've only got one chance at getting clean and straight. I can't afford to blow it. Especially after what my mother and my aunt have been through.' Kit leaned over and kissed him as another jogger puffed past, unnoticing, his red satin shorts dark with sweat.

Kit picked up the envelope from Paul Lestrange. 'Do you think it's all right to open this father business right over the grave of our mother?' she asked Gemma.

'I think it's okay,' said Gemma. 'There are large areas of human experience where the protocols haven't been decided.'

Will threw back his head and laughed in delight. 'Yes,' he said. 'We're at an interesting evolutionary stage.'

Kit opened the envelope again and a piece of paper fell out. She retrieved it, glanced at it then handed it over to Gemma. It was an IOU for thirteen thousand dollars made out to Paul Lestrange and signed by their father. Gemma's heart sank. Where the hell are we going to get thirteen thousand dollars from, she asked herself. I'm barely above water as it is. 'Shit,' she said. 'Our father's left us a nasty debt to Paul Lestrange.'

'There's a note here, from Paul,' said Kit. 'Shall I read it out?'

Gemma nodded. Kit read:

> Dear Kit and Gemma. Your father appointed me executor of his will and I'm writing to you to let you know that he took out a large life insurance policy as soon as he got out and that he's named both of you as beneficiaries. I've checked with the life company and they say you can expect a cheque in a matter of weeks. Your father had to borrow some money from me to make up the first three monthly premiums and I'm enclosing the IOU signed by him.

Gemma's mind was preoccupied. Thirteen thousand is a lot of money, she was thinking as Kit continued to read. It took her a few seconds to absorb what she thought she heard, and it was Will's gasp of amazement that really brought her attention back to the words her sister was reading: 'As you will receive five hundred thousand dollars each from the policy, I'm sure you'll have no problem repaying me. Yours sincerely . . .'

Kit and Gemma stared at each other.

'Holy dooly,' said Will. 'We're rich, we're rich.'

A loud shout from the Ratbag made them swing around, still stunned. The kestrel was lifting off from the boy's arm. Alarmed by the shout, the kestrel flapped higher into the sky. 'Hey!' the Ratbag was yelling. 'Did you see that? He came and sat on my arm! He took the meat from my hand!' He ran along the path delighted, following under the kestrel, which flew higher and higher, finally fluttering in a stationery hover fifty metres in the air.

'Five hundred thousand each,' Gemma breathed.

'Five hundred thousand,' Kit repeated.

Will clasped his hands around his ankles and turned over backwards. 'Whoopee!'

On the path along the edge of the cliff, the Ratbag was still running until he reached the spot where the kestrel hovered motionless above him, treading air. He stood there, looking up, holding his arm up again, hoping for another miracle.

'I can buy my house,' said Kit. 'And have money left over if you ever want to study anything, Will.'

'I can expand my business,' said Gemma. 'I can upgrade everything. The best cameras, the best everything.'

'Thank *you*, Grandfather,' said Will. 'It's okay, Grandma,' he said, remembering and patting the grass of the grave. 'I'm sure you'll understand. Now that you have the distance to see a bigger picture.'

Later, Gemma daydreamed on the deck in the twilight, Beatrix Potter's *Tale of Two Bad Mice* face down on the table. She had a wine and soda in front of her that she sipped from time to time because excitement had made her mouth dry while the chicken curry she'd bought at the Thai place in Clovelly Road remained untouched on the table. I'll be able to get another operator, she thought, whenever the work load gets heavy. I'll never have to sit in a bloody hot car all day again. Or freeze in a van all night. My life is perfect, she thought to herself. Almost. She picked up the book and went inside to ring her sister.

'Okay,' said Gemma. 'I've read it. The mice get into the doll's house and smash up the stuff,' she said. 'And Will smashed up your place. Is that it?'

'Did you notice *what* they smash up?' Kit asked. When Gemma didn't reply she went on. 'It's because they think that the fish on the plate is real, and they're looking forward so much to eating it that they get so angry that they have to smash it up. And the ham. And the butter. And the fruit in the bowl. But none of it is real. They feel they've been

cheated. That's how Will must have felt. And that's why he did exactly the same thing. I started to see that Will only smashed up very specific things. That's what Alexander had immediately realised. And that's why he told me to read the book. He didn't want to tell me. He wanted for me to see it for myself.'

'And you did. And now it's all different,' Gemma said. She became aware of a banging on the door. 'I have to go. There's someone at the door.'

'Taxi!' she squealed when she opened the door. On the doorstep stood the Ratbag, clutching a very bedraggled ginger cat.

'Look,' he said. 'I found your cat for you.'

The cat leapt out of the boy's arms and skidded across the floor. He had lost a lot of weight, but it was Taxi all right. Gemma ran to him and scooped him up. 'Oh, darling Taxi cat. My big, once-fat cat who has returned to me.' Taxi looked around wildly and Gemma could feel his ribs under his fur.

'I found him,' said the Ratbag, 'stuck between some rocks in a cave thing down on the cliffs under the cemetery when I was running after the kestrel. He was sort of half-wedged under a rock. He must've been hunting and some rocks fell on him. I had to move about three or four of them, that big,' he indicated with his arms, 'before I could move him. I heard him meowing, and I went to see what it was.'

'He must be starving,' Gemma said, going to the fridge. Because of Kit's shopping, there were plenty of good things for Taxi and he had his fill of milk, chicken and cheese.

'He's really skinny now,' said the Ratbag. 'I didn't even think it was him at first. Just some cat.'

Taxi was bunting at her chin with the top of his head,

bumping his cheek and neck along her jawbone, starting to make bread on her neck and shoulders.

Ratbag, she wanted to say, you're a winner. 'Tell me something,' she said. 'I'm embarrassed to say that I don't know your name.'

'It's Hugo,' he said, as if he wished it wasn't.

'Is that what they call you?' she asked.

He nodded. 'My mum calls me Hugo. My dad calls me Victor. It means "winner",' he explained proudly.

'And you are,' she said, putting Taxi down. He immediately ran back into the kitchen to check the area of the food bowl. There was nothing left so Gemma gave him some more. Then he jumped up onto the dining room table where he was forbidden to sit and Gemma let him stay just this once. She turned to the Ratbag. 'If you want to, you can come into my place in the afternoons when you come home from school,' she said. 'It must be lonely in your place, waiting for your mum to get home. You could do your homework here. Maybe help me sometimes on the two-way radio to my highly skilled undercover agents.' She said the last few words very slowly and seriously.

The Ratbag's eyes were as big as saucers. 'But right now, I'm going to go next door and ask your mother if I can take you out for tea,' she said. 'As a reward.' She disappeared for a moment and returned. 'Okay, Winner,' she said. 'This calls for a celebration. Where do you want to go?'

The Ratbag grinned widely. 'I love pizza,' he said. 'Could we go to a pizza place?'

Then he noticed Taxi, who had pulled something out from under the sideboard and was pushing it around. It was the small birthday present Steve had brought the ill-fated night of his visit. Slowly, Gemma picked it up and opened it. When she saw what it was, she burst

into tears. When she pressed the red button on his collar, the little battery-operated white cat walked stiffly along and squeaked before falling over, his little legs still walking in air.

THIRTY-SIX

Kit sat at the kitchen table, writing a list of the things she was going to do with the money. Less six and a half, her share of their father's debt, left her with a lot to spare. If she added that to the money she'd got from half the house she and Gerald had sold, she had enough to make a good offer to the owners of this house. The phone rang. She turned down the Coronation Mass and picked it up.

'Kit Westlake speaking.'

'It's me,' said Clive.

'Clive! How are you? Are you all right?'

'It's been a terrible time for me,' he said. Kit waited. 'I really want to change,' he said. 'The way I've been just isn't working. It gets me into terrible trouble. As you've seen.'

'You're already changing, Clive. That's why I knew it wasn't you. All the time the police were harassing you. I knew it wasn't you.'

'Thanks for that,' he said. There was no cleverness or contempt in his voice.

'See you on Wednesday then,' he said and rang off.

Gemma woke to a slight noise. She sat bolt upright, her breath coming in frightened pants. It's all right, she kept telling herself. Just some new sound. There it was again.

This time, she had no doubt. Someone was in her flat. A wave of fear weakened her. Then she rallied.

'Steve?' she called. 'Is that you?'

There was no reply. The .38 was no longer in the bedside drawer. In a fit of righteousness, she'd locked it away properly in the cupboard in her office. Quietly and slowly, she slid out of the bed, moving in a leopard crawl across the carpet to the bedroom door. There was nothing to fear now, she kept telling herself. Adrian Adams was dead, dead, dead. Larry Hagen too. Two killers. Two deaths. It all goes in twos, she reminded herself. It must be Steve.

The place was silent again, but it was a pregnant silence filled with something alien, something heavy and dark. Stop this, she told herself. Just stay reasonable. And calm.

'Steve! Talk to me! *You're frightening me!*'

It wasn't Steve, she knew that now. He wouldn't do this. He wouldn't creep into her place like this, not now. And if he did, he'd never stay silent like this.

'Who's there?' she said, her voice trembling. She got a whiff of it then, the same smell she'd got when Steve had sneaked in; the scent of internal combustion, of engine oil, metal, leather.

'Who are you?' she screamed. 'Answer me!'

Gemma snaked herself up against the wall of her bedroom, almost in the same position she'd been in when she'd challenged Steve. But that time, two things had been different. First, she'd been armed, and second, it had only been Steve.

She was just straining to peer round the doorway into the dim darkness of the lounge area when it happened. Gemma screamed as a piece of darkness separated itself from the night. He pounced on her, crashing her to the ground, his stink filling her nostrils. His leather hands were crushing her

throat. She tried to scream. But as in a nightmare, she could barely make a sound. This was no nightmare; this was the terrible reality. The dreadful pressure building up in her head was forcing her brains out, her eyes out. Her head would burst. With a final surge born of terror, Gemma lashed out with what was left of her strength. She kicked as hard as she could where she imagined his balls might be. It worked. For a second, his grip loosened and he grunted. She pulled away, but the powerful gloved hands found her again, smashing her to the wall as if she'd been a baby. This is it, she thought. I've run out of narrow escapes. Everything goes in twos and this time, there's no one to save me. Goodbye, she thought in her mind. Goodbye to all of the people I love. The heavy body was pressing on her again, hands closed round her throat again. Suddenly, from somewhere there was light. Then Steve's voice.

'*Steve!*' Her voice had no strength. It came out as a bruised whisper but the monster crushing her was gone. She heard the crunch of metal on bone and Steve's bellow of rage and triumph.

'You cowardly mongrel bastard!' he roared.

'Stevie,' she whispered again. 'Oh Steve.' There he was in the dining room, standing panting over the body of an unconscious man, still holding the large silver vase that had stood on the dining room table. Gemma looked at her attacker. She had a memory of him through the driver's window of a green Ford.

'The creep from the gym,' she said.

'It's Maggot,' said Steve, 'from the Outlaw Raiders of the Southern Cross. He's been trying to put me to sleep. I'm needed now to give evidence in court. I didn't realise that one of the keys to this place must have been in the bag I had to leave behind. When he couldn't find me, he started

hunting you. That's when I started on him.' Steve put the vase down. He looked exhausted and finished. Then he looked at her where she huddled against the wall, rubbing her bruised throat with her good hand. Gemma stood up wobbling and Steve opened his arms.

'Come here, you,' he said.

When Gemma Lincoln finds her clothes laid out in the effigy of 'woman' with a slashed throat and crotch, she discovers that her friend Detective Sergeant Angie McDonald has seen something similar before – but instead of an effigy, it's a real body: the slashed woman is the trademark of a perverse killer.

Gemma's father, psychiatrist Archie Chisholm, is about to be released from prison after serving his sentence for murdering Gemma's mother. Gemma believes her father is innocent, as he has always claimed, and has assembled evidence to prove it, using scientific techniques unknown a generation earlier. Her older sister Kit, however, is convinced their father is guilty.

But if Dr Chisholm did not murder his wife, who did?

The violence escalates as the trauma of thirty years ago weaves together with the terror of the murderer currently stalking the streets. And the dangerous energies that Gemma has stirred up bring about a situation in which she must literally fight for her life.

Don't miss Gabrielle Lord's most recent thriller, The Sharp End, also available from Coronet.

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